INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Nelson's office, New York City

Tape 1 of 3

G: Let's start with your association with the Peace Corps. How did you get involved with that?

N: I had met Bill Moyers and Sarge Shriver during the 1960 campaign. I was at Princeton. That would have been my senior year during the campaign. I worked for the Johnson-Kennedy ticket during that campaign. I was doing my senior honors thesis for the School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton on the expropriation of American property in Cuba in 1959. After the election and the inaugural in 1961, Bill and Sarge were very helpful getting me interviews with certain people I needed in the State Department for my thesis. That was turned in in April, and that was about it for my senior year, really, except waiting around to take final orals.

I had become friendly with Bill. At that time Bill had left the Vice President's staff, Mr. Johnson's staff, and gone over with Sarge to try to get this entity started, which I believe at that point didn't even have the name "Peace Corps." They were referring to it as the "Youth Corps." I was on my way to the University of Virginia Law School the following September and Bill said, "Why don't you go to work with

us during the summer?" I did and I stayed--never got to Charlottesville. I became the administrative assistant to Shriver. But there were only a half dozen of us at the time in the Peace Corps. It was Nancy Gore and Sally Bowles. It was just getting started.

G: Do you have any idea how the idea of the Peace Corps evolved?

N: It was an idea that I believe was the basic brain child of Hubert Humphrey and Henry Reuss of Wisconsin. Lyndon Johnson took up the cause. It was not a Kennedy program. It fit into the whole spirit of the Kennedy Administration, certainly, very easily, but it was really Lyndon Johnson's baby. He nurtured it through enabling legislation as a program. Indeed, other than the space program, while he was vice president, his great love affair in the government was the Peace Corps. He was chairman of the Advisory Council as vice president. But it was really, truly, his program from a concept that was, I believe, evolved by Hubert Humphrey and Henry Reuss, as a corps of young people who would go overseas and do good things in developing countries.

I stayed with the program and enrolled in Georgetown Law School at night rather than going on to the University of Virginia Law School. Then in 1962 I had an altercation with the Army because I had an ROTC commission from Princeton. The Army claimed I was not a full-time graduate student, therefore I had to take my active duty commission immediately. I went to Sarge and I said, "Sarge, I'm already working for the government. I don't know why I can't continue like this until I at least complete law school." He said, "Why don't you take it up with Mr. Johnson?" I had started to come in contact with Mr. Johnson

quite a bit because of his involvement with the Peace Corps. I was writing some speeches for him on the Peace Corps and doing some traveling with him. I did go to see the Vice President and asked if he could help me get a deferral from active duty, at least until I finished my graduate studies. He said, "Why do that? Just go ahead and take your commission, and then you can come on my staff as my military aide." Which I did. I went to Fort Sill and did my officer's basic and came back to the Vice President's staff as his junior military aide. He'd had a couple of colonels and captains. At that time I joined the staff there was one Army colonel.

G: Was that Colonel [William F.] Jackson?

N: Yes.

G: Let's pick up some things on the Peace Corps before we get into the LBJ orbit. Do you know how it got the name Peace Corps? Who thought of that?

N: No. It had the name I believe when it went up for its enabling legislation, but I don't know how the name Peace Corps evolved from Youth Corps other than the fact that it really was more accurate, because it was not supposed to be restricted just to young people. We had seventy-five year old grandmothers teaching in Pakistan, things like that. Also there was a great impetus in the government at that time to avoid words like war. At the same time I imagine that they changed from Youth Corps to Peace Corps was the time they changed the name of the War Room in the Pentagon to the National Military Command Center.

G: Can you describe Johnson's involvement in the Peace Corps? You said he was chairman of the Advisory Committee. What was his attitude toward the Peace Corps?

N: He thought it was probably one of the great things that this country ever did. Really, I think he would have preferred the Youth Corps to the Peace Corps. Maybe it was because I was still a student myself -- twenty-two, twenty-three years old, but Lyndon Johnson struck me as a teacher, very much so, with a great fondness for young people. He could see young people doing things. He believed that one of the most important things that the United States could do was to send its young people overseas in programs like the Peace Corps to get to know people in developing countries and to make friends. I'm not talking about making friends between Washington and Lahore, Pakistan. I'm talking about on a personal, one-to-one level: the young teacher in Pakistan, the young teacher from Iowa. [He believed] that this was the way the shrinking world had to develop, so that there were personal contacts between the youth in various countries. The actual programs that the Peace Corps were doing were really secondary to this idea of personal involvement and contact with the people overseas.

G: Did he ever relate it to his experience as NYA director or working with youth that way?

N: I never heard him relate it that way. He always made references to his own background.

G: Did he?

N: Yes. But the references rolled over my head because at that time I wasn't that aware of his own background. My information on Lyndon Johnson's background went back to his Senate majority [leader] days. It was only later that I really got to know about his youth and where he grew up and his teaching background and so forth. So whatever references he would make on a personal level sort of rolled over me at the time. This was a part of it. I mean, it was a part of the man's make-up, I'm sure.

G: When he traveled as vice president, did he visit Peace Corps projects?

N: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about Johnson visiting the Peace Corps projects.

N: I never traveled with him overseas to any of the Peace Corps projects. He did make one extended tour to Africa and so forth as vice president, which was during the time I was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. My other foreign trips with Johnson were in Europe, where we didn't have any Peace Corps involvement. But I believe he visited a number of the projects, especially on that African tour. But we didn't have all that many projects going at that time. There was Ghana; there were two or three others. I think he visited one in the Philippines. I think he visited the African projects that were extant at that time.

G: There's a certain component of the concept of Peace Corps, it seems to me, that is in a sense radical, because you create a certain awareness among the people that you are working with. Perhaps a little bit of community organization would make them more political. Was this the intent?

N: To make them more political?

G: Yes, to do community organization in essence.

N: Well, I think [it was] to make young Americans more political in almost the classic Greek sense of politics meaning people, really. Not so much as ward-heeling or organization, getting out the vote, but getting them involved in and directing this energy into the Greek classical sense of politics.

G: But didn't some of the host governments feel that the Peace Corps members in their countries had on occasion sort of stirred up community groups by organizing them, by making them aware, by engaging in, say, village projects, something like this?

N: Yes. Well, there was of course the classic case of Margery Michelmore who dropped the post card in Nigeria which created pandemonium. I was in charge of the decompression of Margery when she got back to the United States.

G: Really?

N: Yes. I had a partner in the Peace Corps, a guy named Blair Butterworth. He and I had been classmates at Princeton. We worked together in the Peace Corps. We both did similar jobs for Sarge and for Bill. We were sort of young bachelors in Washington. We were assigned to Margery when she got back to the States, more [as] bodyguards in keeping the press away, and keeping her from dropping any more post cards, really, until we could decompress the situation.

G: What was her reaction to all that?

N: She was stunned. I mean, she had meant no harm. [It was] a little dumb to say what she said in a post card--if she had put it in a sealed letter it would have been better. What she said was true. I mean, it was a rotten place. She didn't say it derogatorily but it was a fact. It was quite a cultural shock. This was the major problem for most of the people who went over there. It was the cultural shock of going from Manhattan or Dallas and suddenly finding themselves in a situation that you just can't imagine in this country, different values, foods, and everything else. It was quite a shock to most of the kids who got over there.

The governments, sure, were suspicious. Actually, everybody in the governments overseas was convinced that all of our corpsmen were CIA, which we took great pains to make sure was not a fact. Lyndon Johnson, especially, was just absolutely adamant that the agency had no involvement whatever with any of the Peace Corps people. Not because they might have been good intelligence gatherers, but because it would really blow the project. You did have terribly suspicious political leaders in the foreign countries, if suddenly a hundred, two hundred, road surveyors [arrived] like on the Ghana project--I'm sorry, the Tanganyika project--Ghana was a teaching project; Tanganyike was a road-building project--teaching surveying, teaching construction skills. I mean, when those guys got to Tanganyika it looked like the Eighty-Second Airborne. These were tough guys who were rough and ready. They were surveyors--road builders. They were more used to working in rough terrain and rough climatic conditions than the kids who went on the

teaching projects in Accra, Ghana. But I'm sure it was very frightening for the political leaders to see these guys with their hard hats walking around. They did look suspiciously like para-military. But they weren't, by any means. I mean, it was just the opposite.

G: Anything else on the Peace Corps? Any important decisions that you participated in that you feel is important?

N: I can't really [remember] any important decisions. I don't think we ever really made any really important decisions, at least at my level, I was really operational. If any important decisions were made it was made before it got to me to execute. The major important decision of the Peace Corps was that it was to be a pure, idealistic program, with no interference from intelligence agencies, from the military people. Because it had that tone there really weren't any crisis kind of situations, except when something happened like the post card incident or a serious injury, something like that with volunteers. It was the spirit of the New Frontier in Washington at that time. I assume that's how it has come to be a New Frontier program, but it was really a Lyndon Johnson program.

G: You step into the role as Johnson's military aide--

N: "Junior" military aide.

G: Junior military aide.

N: Yes. I was the highest-ranking second lieutenant in the United States Army.

G: What did you do in that capacity?

N: I wrote speeches. I advanced trips. I handled certain security matters.

He's still vice president, now, at this time. I took care of the beagles when he went to the Ranch--all kinds of high important political matters like that.

G: Which trips did you advance?

N: The Benelux.

G: I knew you went on that trip.

N: Yes. Then I came back and went with the Vice President, which was the only foreign trip between the time I joined the Johnson staff and the time he became president. Then I did a lot of domestic advancing. Basically, because of my military position, my advancing jobs were liaison with security and military, air force, helicopters, local police, so forth, Secret Service. I wrote speeches, and I drafted some memoranda for him on things I thought that the vice president could be doing, because it was a very boring time for Lyndon Johnson, being vice president. It was terribly boring. This was a bored man.

I was also adopted as a Texan at that time. I'm a Virginian by birth. I was the only non-Texan on the staff, so I was forced to join the Texas State Society.

G: Oh, really? Who did you work with on these speeches? Did you work with Horace Busby?

N: I worked with Buzz a lot. Basically, if I had a speech to do I didn't work with anybody. I wrote it and gave it to the boss. He would turn it back to me with everything crossed out but the page numbers and tell me it was a sensational job and to do it again. I did it until I could adopt his cadence, really. I had never written for the ear before,

which was quite an entirely different art than writing for the eye. But then I finally got his cadence down. I never wrote any major policy speeches. I would be in charge of writing these speeches that the Vice President had to give all the time to one group or another.

G: How would you describe his cadence?

N: He spoke publicly--well, I think Horace Busby coined the phrase "in dingbat." If you would see one of his speeches typed out on a typewriter there would be a lot of what we called "dingbats," which were dash, dash, dash; dash, dash, dash; dash, dash, dash. It was the way he spoke, but to write it you would have to create punctuations that English teachers never taught you--to get in the swing of the way he liked to address a crowd. Frankly, his best speeches were always when he deviated from the text and went off on his own.

G: What was the best speech you ever heard him give?

N: The best speech I think I ever heard him give was in New Orleans during the 1964 campaign. I'm jumping ahead in history a bit, but I was in charge of the polls during the 1964 campaign--not from Poland, from Gallup. He was running 20 per cent in Louisiana: 80/Goldwater, 20/Johnson. I mean it was just absolutely devastating. He made the decision one night to go into New Orleans. He followed Barry Goldwater into New Orleans. Goldwater had told the people that, basically, he would question their loyalty as Americans if they didn't vote for Barry Goldwater. It wasn't quite that strong but almost, in campaign kind of rhetoric. Lyndon Johnson said, "I'm going to New Orleans.

I'm talking about civil rights. This is the law of the land, and let's get it out of the streets and in the courts if it's a problem for the people to accept." Frankly he was tired of hearing the word nigger, he was tired of hearing all the noise about civil rights, because it was the law, period.

At the end of the speech he deviated from the text. It was a speech that sticks in my memory most of all because he did a parody on Barry Goldwater at the end of his speech. He said, "Now if you don't vote for Lyndon Johnson, I'm not going to question your loyalty as Americans. I'm not going to question whether you were really right or wrong in your own heart. But one night, a long time after the election, I'm going to be in bed and I'm going to turn over to Lady Bird and say, 'Bird, you know those folks down in New Orleans. I really question their judgment.'" (Laughter) And the crowd just melted into his hands at that point. It just stuck in my memory as one of the really typical and great [examples of] Johnson's ability to bring the people to him. A great gift. I just thought that was the best speech he ever gave. I'm sure there were others more important and greater, but that's the one that has always stuck in my mind.

G: Let's talk about Lyndon Johnson as vice president for a few minutes. My impression is that he was very restless.

N: Extremely so. I said earlier that he was bored. I think he was. He was bored and therefore restless. He would ramble around The Elms, his house. I moved into an apartment quite near the Johnson's house in

Spring Valley and so I would go over to the house very early in the morning, and he would just be padding around in his pajamas like a restless bear, with no important cables to read and no important phone calls, waiting for the Senate to open, really, at ten o'clock.

G: Was he being excluded, do you think, from important decisions by the administration?

N: I don't think he was being excluded by President Kennedy. Kennedy confided in Johnson quite a bit. There was a great deal of mutual respect and admiration between the two. He did in fact consult with the President quite a bit. He was excluded, I think, from--well, a lot of the decisions don't necessarily take place on the presidential level, they take place on the secretarial level or the departmental level. I think he was excluded from a lot of those problems and decisions, primarily because everybody has their own club and he really wasn't in the Kennedy club. He was not Harvard. He wasn't Boston.

G: In particular that Kennedy civil rights bill was one example where perhaps LBJ's legislative expertise could have really come in handy. Yet they really didn't consult him on it, did they?

N: No. No.

G: Did he talk about this? Did this seem to bother him?

N: He never talked about it to me, but that was the one area that he thought was [important]. There was no war at that time. There was nothing really internationally of a critical nature. Other than the space program and things like the Peace Corps, the things that he thought were most important were things like the civil rights movement. He was to

a large extent excluded. I think he was hurt by this because the problems that were occurring, the violence, were taking place in the South: Mississippi, Alabama. I think he felt that the Justice Department and perhaps some of the people around President Kennedy were really making a mistake by not bringing him into it. Because he felt--and he did--he could have defused a lot of situations, I'm sure. But I've never heard any [complaints], just impressions that I had thinking back in retrospect of almost fifteen years. If he ever said anything, it was muttering.

G: He was also on the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity.

N: Yes.

G: Did he devote much time to that?

N: No. Not because it didn't concern him, but there wasn't that much to do on a day-to-day basis, at least for him. He was concerned about it and he met with the Equal Employment people all the time, but it didn't hold much of a challenge. The space program held a great deal of challenge. I think he saw the future in the space program as being very important and a little more demanding of his stature at that time, especially with legislation and appropriations and so forth.

G: In this connection did you observe his involvement with the space program?

N: Yes.

G: What in particular?

N: He felt that the status of the United States as a great nation was really at stake, that there were very few ways that the country could prove itself.

One way in which it could prove itself was by keeping its own house in order with political justice and equal opportunities and so forth here. But the real public relations effort on a world scale was going to the moon, just proving that we were technologically superior to any other country. He also felt very strongly that the fallout from the space program was of great practical importance to the country: medicine, manufacturing. Which is true. So many things came out on a daily basis as fallout from the space program of a technological nature.

G: I gather that he was a bit in disagreement with the Kennedy Administration's sale of wheat to the Soviet Union. Did he ever talk about that?

N: No. I don't [recall it].

G: How about on Vietnam at the time he was vice president? He went to Vietnam once.

N: Yes, he did. I believe the Vietnam trip was a few months before I joined the staff. What was the date of that trip? Do you know? [May 11, 1961] Not that it's important, I wasn't on the trip with him. But I do know that he talked about that trip quite a bit afterwards. He was very disturbed, I remember, one day and I really don't have the background of why. But I remember him being exceedingly disturbed at the assassination of Diem.

G: Where was he? Where was LBJ?

N: He was getting off an airplane, and I was waiting in the limousine for him with the evening papers.

G: Was this at Andrews [Air Force Base]?

N: Andrews, yes. I forget where he was just back from. But the chauffeur had all the papers in the front. I was in the back. I handed him the papers when he got off the plane. The headlines were, I forget, you know, "Diem Assassinated," or something. He was muttering, "Goddamn it. This is wrong."

G: He had met Diem, of course, when he was over there. I guess it was 1961.

N: Right. And Madame Nhu.

G: I gather he was much more supportive of Diem than the Kennedy Administration was.

N: Yes.

G: He felt he was a strong leader.

N: He felt he was a strong leader and I think he personally felt a strong politician's kinship with Diem. He understood Diem's problems as a political person. And Lyndon Johnson was a political animal. I haven't been in contact with that many presidents, but the man's uncanny sense of the politics of the people was incredible. I think he really felt a kinship with Diem on that basis. He also felt that governmental disruptions in a situation like that were fraught with just the worst possible consequences.

G: What else did he say? Can you remember his exact words about this?

N: Expletives deleted?

G: No, just in general.

N: He said, "Goddamn it. This shouldn't have been allowed to happen. I don't know where Vietnam is going to go now." Words to that effect.

And it was a lot of muttering and then a lot of silence on the way back to The Elms and then a lot of phone calls.

G: Who did he call?

N: I don't know. I was playing with the beagles at the time.

G: Did he feel that the U.S., or let's say the CIA, had participated in that, or at least acquiesced in the [assassination]?

N: At least to the point of maybe we could have prevented it. I'm not sure whether he felt we acquiesced or participated, but I think he felt that we certainly had the clout to prevent a situation like that. Which might have been naive on his part to think that we could, because a few months later we were unable to prevent the assassination of our own president. Of course, one was a case of a nut and the other was a case of a political thing. But I do think he felt that we lost control of that situation. That was a turning point of a dangerous situation.

G: Did LBJ's speeches have to be approved by the Kennedy people in advance?

N: Well, the ones that I wrote certainly didn't. Some of the policy speeches did go over to the White House for their chop. But generally speaking, I would say 99 per cent of the speeches did not require approval until Kennedy went to Texas in November of 1963, where Kennedy's speeches came to the Vice President's office for approval because it was Texas. But I'm sure there was, on the policy speeches, a lot of coordination in any event.

G: Let's see, in October, 1963 I believe you went with him to New York, didn't you?

N: Yes.

G: You and Ivan Sinclair?

N: Ivan Sinclair.

G: Can you describe that trip?

N: In October of 1963? Oh, I remember, yes, yes. That was for some speech at the Waldorf, I believe. Was it the Smith dinner or something like that? Yes, the Al Smith bash at the Waldorf. Nothing was terribly memorable about the trip or the speech, but it was one of the great evenings after the speech. We got back to the hotel. We were in the presidential suite at the Waldorf Towers. There were only three vice presidential staff members on the trip. There was Marie [Fehmer Chiarodo], and Ivan and myself. Let's see, we had Congressman--I'm trying to think of the congressman from Texas who was with us. It wasn't Jim Wright. It was one of the other congressmen from Texas and his wife. We all decided to go to El Morocco. I think Johnson's words were, "Okay, kids. Get on your dancing shoes." We went to El Morocco. I think what was amazing was nobody recognized the Vice President of the United States. We sat at the bar for a few minutes. We went to a table. It was Mrs. Johnson's birthday, I believe. She wasn't there; she was at the Ranch. Was it her birthday? Was it an anniversary?

G: No.

N: Maybe he was just homesick, but he got the violinist in the phone booth with him and called Mrs. Johnson and he had the violinist serenade Lady Bird over the telephone.

G: What did the violinist play?

N: I can't remember the tune, but it was something that was very close to them personally.

G: "Yellow Rose of Texas?"

N: No, I think it was a little more romantic than that. I thought that was very charming. He had the violinist right in the phone booth. The guy got his bow stuck in the booth while he was serenading Mrs. Johnson. They were quite a couple. They were a very cute couple.

G: Anything else on that trip that is memorable?

N: Yes. The Secret Service and I did several hundred dollars damage in the hotel.

G: How did that happen?

N: We had a contest on how many chairs we could jump over. They were quite good. I missed the last chair and went through an antique chair. The Secret Service covered up for me. I think it was the only cover up I ever [participated in]. They informed the hotel it was a defective chair.

Do you want to jog my memory on anything that maybe I should have remembered from that trip?

G: Well, did he talk about New York or New York politics? Did he see Ed Weisl, or anything like that?

N: This trip to New York blurs my memory a bit with the next trip to New York, which was his first venture out of Washington after the assassination, in December, I believe, of 1963, when he went to President Hoover's funeral. No, it wasn't. It was Governor [Herbert] Lehman's funeral, I'm sorry. But he visited Herbert Hoover, who was still alive

at the time. The side meetings that occurred in that visit and the one in October sort of blur. There was a meeting with Mayor [Robert F.] Wagner that I'm not sure--

G: That was this trip.

N: That was in October? Yes, we met with Mayor Wagner at the time.

G: It was Jack Brooks that went along.

N: Jack Brooks, that's right, absolutely. There's nothing like a historian. That's right, Jack Brooks and his very charming wife.

G: He did meet with Ed Weisl?

N: Yes.

G: Were you there then?

N: I was with him so much in meetings with Ed Weisl that [I can't remember]. I really felt very close to Eddie the Wise, as I called him.

G: What did they talk about when they were together?

N: State of the nation. State of the economy. Ed Weisl always used to be like a--well, we called him Eddie the Wise because he was like a patriarch adviser to the kings on demeanor, conduct in office, this kind of [thing]. I never heard any specifics at that trip.

I remember the meeting with Mayor Wagner, where Lyndon Johnson said that he thought that Wagner had the toughest job in the world, being mayor of New York.

G: Oh, really?

N: He said, "When you're the president or the vice president, or even a governor, all of your dissidents are spread out," I think his words were,

"but you got eight million sons of bitches right here in one place. It's the toughest job in the world, Bob, and I wouldn't want it."

G: Did LBJ ever talk about having met or seen Al Smith?

N: No.

G: He didn't?

N: Not to me. Not that I remember.

G: Here's an itinerary for the Benelux trip. Why don't you just sort of go through that and anything there that reminds you of something significant or interesting, talk about it.

N: This was the funniest trip I was ever on in my life. I guess because he was vice president and there was nothing very critical, other than good will. It was just a hilarious trip from beginning to end. I mean, first of all, the crowd on this trip was one of the funniest crowds that could have gotten together for a trip anywhere. You know, you could have made a TV series like "The Love Boat" out of this trip between Liz Carpenter and Bess Abell, Willis Hurst, who was the President's doctor. It was really one of the funny, remarkable excursions that I think any government team ever made anywhere. We knew we couldn't do any harm. I mean, we weren't going to go to war with Luxembourg any time soon.

G: Was he in a good mood that trip?

N: Yes, yes. Absolutely.

G: He wasn't nervous or high strung?

N: No. It was the first time since I had been with him that I had really seen him relaxed. He was just in a super mood the whole trip.

G: Why do you think that was?

N: Maybe because it wasn't critical. As I said, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and Belgium, of course, were important from the standpoint of the European Economic Community and the Common Market, but it just wasn't anything we could really do wrong on this trip. There was a lot of good feeling and good will. But he was expansive. He was delightful. He was funny. His great interest in art came out in this trip. He bought a lot of paintings for the Ranch.

G: Did he dicker with the artists or the gallery owners?

N: He referred to it as "horse-trading," I believe. He told me--I'd negotiated a couple of them for him--that he never wanted me to come down and buy any cattle for him at the Ranch. (Laughter) He said, "Boy, I got to teach you how to do this right." So the next gallery he did the negotiating.

G: Can you describe what happened there?

N: Well, there was one in Belgium. He had seen a painting in a window during a motorcade that took his fancy. When we got to wherever we were going in the motorcade he sent me back in a cab. He said, "Get the owner of the gallery to bring those three paintings up to the hotel room." I went back to the gallery; we took them out of the window, and the woman brought them up to the hotel room. We sat them up on the sofa for him. He came back in with Mrs. Johnson. He said, "Bird, do you like these?" She said, "Well, if you do." They weren't very remarkable as art, but he sort of took a fancy to them. [There were] some cows [in them], I guess that was one reason. He said to the lady, "How much are these?"

She told him. She was somewhat in awe of being in the presence of the Vice President of the United States. One of my jobs on this trip was being the keeper of the trinket box: the silver Zippo lighters and the gold pens and the Stetson hats, you know, the baubles and beads for the natives. These were entrusted to my care, because Mr. Johnson used to take count of how many lighters we had, because he paid for them personally out of his own pocket. But he was softening her up. He signaled for me to come over, and he said, "Give me a lighter." The silver Zippo was the best thing we gave away. So I reached into my pocket and gave him one of the vice presidential lighters. He gave it to the lady, as part of the Johnson treatment, softening-up process. Then he asked her how much the painting was. She told him. He told her she was out of her mind. He said, "I'm not a rich man. How much do you think the vice president of the United States makes? I can't afford that." And the haggle took place. I think that intrigued me more than all of the political processes that I had seen, because this was the so-called famous Johnson treatment. He finally bought that painting for the price that he wanted to pay, and he had that woman eating out of his hand. I think she was almost on the verge of giving them to him. He wouldn't allow that. But he really gave this woman the famous Johnson treatment.

G: Was this all in English?

N: Yes.

G: Did he have a translator?

N: No. This was done in sign language and some interpretation. The woman spoke some English. There was some French. He was so delighted that he

made me give the woman a second lighter at the end of the negotiating process. The woman turned to me. She said, "I already have one." I said, "Now you have two." (Laughter) And he kept wanting to look at those pictures. The whole trip we had to keep packing them and unpacking them. He loved those paintings.

G: Did he buy three from her or just one?

N: I don't remember how many he bought there. He bought about a dozen on the whole trip. Then we bought guns at Browning.

G: Did he dicker there?

N: No. They had a price list, and it was fixed. It was fixed for U.S. government personnel. There was no haggling there. Mr. Johnson bought me a shotgun as a gift. I want to make it clear for the historical record that anything he bought on these trips wasn't out of counter part funds or things. He would either write checks on his personal account back in Texas, or he would charge it to his own credit card.

G: He bought the women dresses, too, I think.

N: He bought the women dresses. He loved his women, and I mean <u>his</u> women, the girls and Lady Bird. He was always very concerned with how they dressed. Even in New York with I believe Norman Norell, [he was concerned] that they be properly attired. But he loved to pick out dresses. He loved to buy presents for the girls and for Mrs. Johnson. He had that special effect on women. I know when my wife met him for the first time she was impressed by the aura of Lyndon Johnson. He had the ability to make a women feel like she was the only woman in the world. My wife is very petite, and of course Lyndon Johnson was an enormous man. He

was bigger than life. He was the Big Country. He was overwhelming to my wife, you know, in physical size. You really understood how this man had his tremendous political magnetism, because in person his magnetism was unreal, [to] men and women, but especially women. He made every woman he met feel that she was the only woman in the world. I think there are very few people who have had this ability, maybe Maurice Chevalier. And he enjoyed it. He loved people, I think.

G: Let's see, is there anything else--

N: I didn't get through here. Yes, there was the great military ceremony in Luxembourg. I, of course, as I told you, was the highest-ranking second lieutenant in the United States Army. Mr. Johnson never let me wear my uniform, which I should have gone into. Backing up just a moment, when I finished with Fort Sill, I had to come back to the Pentagon for a couple of weeks, before I was physically transferred to the Office of the Vice President. I was called in by the Chief of Public Information, General somebody-or-other at the Pentagon, who informed me of my exalted position, that I would have to have special uniforms and special everything. They gave me a list of the uniforms that they just didn't make for second lieutenants. I had to go ahead and have them made. And of course, being an aide to the Vice President, I couldn't have the nylon gold aiguillettes, I had to have the gold, gold aiguillettes, which were like two hundred dollars for these gold things that wrapped around your sleeve and over your shoulder.

My first day with the Vice President I got dressed in my very best class A's, with my gold aiguillettes and my braid and ribbons and bangles, and with my vice presidential badge and my vice presidential aide tips on my collar that I had to order especially from some jeweler in Philadelphia because you can't buy them at the PX. And I walked into the Vice President's office--this was in the EOB [Executive Office Building]. I figured I would do it right and I said, "Good morning, Mr. Vice President, Lieutenant Nelson reporting for duty, sir," and I saluted. He said, "Cut out the crap. I don't want to ever see you wearing those loafer's loops." He called aides' aiguillettes, "loafer's loops." He said, "You don't have to wear any uniforms here."

I only wore uniforms twice again in my vice presidential military career. Once I went to a formal dinner dance with my white mess jacket. I had a blind date and my date thought I was the doorman at the hotel. Then fifteen people asked me to get them drinks at the dance, and I went back and changed into a tuxedo in the middle of the party. (Laughter)

The next time I wore a uniform was on this Benelux trip in Luxembourg. The Chief of Staff of NATO command or something had joined up with the entourage. The Vice President was to lay a wreath at Hamm, the military cemetery at--I believe General Patton's grave. General Patton--Pershing? I think Patton was buried there. The Chief of Staff introduced Mr. Johnson to some major or captain or something and said, "He will be your military escort for the wreath-laying ceremony." The Vice President said, "I brought my own," and he pointed to me. I said,

whispering, "I didn't bring a uniform." So they had to outfit me with a uniform real quickly. We went out there and we laid the wreath. As we were marching--I, of course, was carrying the wreath--the press was there taking pictures. I whispered, "Mr. Johnson, I don't know exactly what we're supposed to do. I don't know how long we're supposed to stand here." And he gave me some great political military advice. He said, "Until they stop clicking the shutters." That's the signal to march back.

G: Great. Just great.

N: But we went on from there. We met the Archduchess of Luxembourg. We gave the Archduke a Stetson, which he didn't know what to do with. On the trip to the Netherlands, Bess Abell and the Chief of Protocol, Angie Duke [Angier Biddle Duke], were busy preparing the state gifts that would be presented. They wrapped a big red bow around me and sent me into the Vice President's cabin in the plane and told him I was the state gift for the princess.

(Laughter)

G: What did he say to that?

N: I think he thought they were serious for a moment. He just looked at us like we were all insane. But we were. Willis Hurst and I planned to write a book on that trip. We had great times outlining our book that we were going to write called Man Friday, about an aide to the vice president, which never got hatched. But, let's see.

We had a great party. It was a fun trip. We had a dinner party--well, it was a state dinner--given by King Baudouin in the palace in

Belgium, which was another funny incident. The President used to very often call me King Richard. We all had to go through the reception line to be formally introduced to the King and Queen. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were in the reception line and the Prime Minister and Chief of Protocol. You went to a big velvet rope and then they announced you. You stepped forward and were introduced to the King. I was at the tail end, as one of the spear carriers on this voyage, as Busby referred to it--we were the spear carriers. The Vice President really didn't hold with this pomp. It just wasn't his style. Finally, there must have been five hundred people in this very formal curtsying, bowing, hand-kissing reception line. This was for the King. This was not like a reception line at the Alfred Smith Dinner. It was a little foreign to all of us, really. This was really royalty in the palace. I got up to the velvet rope. Before they announced my name, I guess because Mr. Johnson finally saw a friendly face, he said, "King Richard." You know, everybody in the palace, their heart stopped. There was some royalty they didn't know about sneaking around in the palace. Then Angie Duke started laughing, thought that was terribly funny, because King Baudouin was looking around to see if there was another pretender to the throne in the room.

G: Was LBJ relaxed around European royalty?

N: Yes. Very much.

G: What was he like with them?

N: Well, King Baudouin was a very relaxed guy. He was a nice guy for a king. He was the only king I've ever met, but he was really a very

relaxed guy himself. They were talking about deer-hunting. The king had shot the deer that we had for dinner there. Of course that was an immediate affinity between the two men. He was just terribly relaxed. He kept referring to [them], you know, [as] King and Queen. He didn't use any really formal [form of address]. The protocol people were always about to have heart attacks because he was so relaxed.

G: What did he call him?

N: King.

G: Did he?

N: "Hey King." (Laughter) But he was just terribly relaxed. I think the King sort of got a kick out of it, because Johnson had this way of being very natural and very Texan. You're a Texan. I don't want to offend you, but there's a thing; there's a style; there's an ambience about Texans. 99 per cent of my business right now is involving Saudi Arabia, and I can see how the Arabs have always had an affinity for the oil people who are predominantly from the Southwest and from Texas, because of this openness, this candidness, this naturalness, whether it was with the King of Saudi Arabia, or the King of Belgium. It's a relaxed thing. I know King Baudouin enjoyed the company of Lyndon Johnson.

(Interruption)

There was nobody closer to Lyndon Johnson than me, or with more power, because I was the only guy in the White House who could put in his contact lenses. When you have your finger in the presidential eye, it's a feeling of power. It really is. (Laughter) I used to have to put in his lenses. He could never do it.

G: I gather he never really adjusted to them.

N; No. He never had the patience for them.

G: Yet he did not like to be photographed with his glasses on.

N: Which was a shame, because it added a great deal to his character, his glasses. He would always take them off when he was being photographed, and really when he did get caught by the photographers with his glasses on, there was a great deal more strength of character in the photograph I always thought. As an amateur photographer I would much rather have seen him photographed with his glasses on. It gave him an FDR kind of quality.

G: Is there anything else on that trip that you feel is memorable?

N: Well, the whole trip was like a grand tour of Europe. There were exceedingly earnest and frank discussions with [Paul-Henri] Spaak in Belgium.

G: What did they say? Did you recall?

N: They discussed the Common Market, basically. I was not present at the actual formal meeting. That was one of the really major important points of this trip from a government-business standpoint. Johnson conveyed the views of the U.S. government on the Common Market and on England's participation in the Common Market. I think Spaak was very impressed with Lyndon Johnson. In the official meetings I wasn't present. I was present later at the Ambassador s--I believe it was Ambassador [Douglas] MacArthur [II] at the time--at his home when he had a private party for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister slicing the turkey himself, sort of a friendly down home kind of party. The Prime Minister was making

many, many, many comments about how much he was impressed by Lyndon Johnson. And of course Spaak was the father of the Common Market, a very important movement in European economics at that time.

[I can't recall anything else] other than my being assigned by the Vice President to a very attractive young lady from the press corps, who was making the Vice President very nervous on this trip. I forget who she was. She was very attractive. She was from Texas, and a young reporter going after stories, nothing of any moment, but she was beginning to get on his nerves a bit, as a Sarah McClendon, a May Craig. would have gotten on his nerves with persistent, inconsequential questions. I was provided with the vice presidential instructions to get her out of his hair. So I had a more than pleasant trip because I was assigned to [escort] the young lady. I squired her around. But I was able to do my duty for God and country.

G: Let's talk about--unless there's anything else on that trip that you can [recall]?

N: I can't really think of any. It may come back to me.

G: There were a number of developments back in the United States. First of all President Kennedy was planning a trip to Texas. He was evidently doing this with Governor [John] Connally rather than the Vice President. Is that correct?

N: Yes.

G: Do you recall the situation there?

N: We were very uneasy about this trip, frankly. The horror of that trip, in retrospect, make some things seem out of proportion years later.

It was a trip Lyndon Johnson, I don't believe, really wanted Kennedy to make.

G: Why do you say that?

N: I mean nobody knew there was going to be a Lee Harvey Oswald hiding out in the building there, but Johnson felt that he could carry the ticket in that part of the country without Kennedy going down there. There were a tremendous number of vying political forces in Texas in particular at that time. Even though Johnson was vice president, he was still a Texan more than an American in those days. He was still highly regionalized in his domestic political attitudes. That was his turf, and I think he would have felt better if he had picked the time and the agendas and so forth for that trip. But we did a lot of work on that trip on speech-writing and so forth. As I said, most of Kennedy's speeches came over to our office for approval on that trip, because the White House knew they were then going into Johnson country.

G: Do you think that LBJ resented the fact that the trip seemed to be arranged through Governor Connally rather than through himself?

N: I didn't get that feeling. At least it wasn't conveyed to me.

(Interruption)

There was just a vague unease about this trip. I don't know whether it was because Connally was running the show and not Mr. Johnson. I never really fully understood Texas politics. That wasn't my job to understand it. I didn't really understand all of the subtleties of the inter-political plays in Texas. But it was not a trip that anybody looked forward to.

G: I guess it was about this time, before the trip, that the Bobby Baker episode really blew open. What was your knowledge of this? Were you able to observe Lyndon Johnson's reaction to the revelation that Baker had. . . ?

N: Yes. I really got an insight on that on the trip we talked about before, with Ivan Sinclair and myself to El Morocco in New York. Because the three of us who went with him on that trip--that was really the height of the Baker thing right about that time--there was Marie Fehmer, who was his youngest secretary, and Ivan Sinclair and myself. We were the three youngest people on his staff. There was no other staff on that trip to New York. We were sitting in the living room there, and he was looking over some newspaper stories on the Baker thing. He looked at the three of us and--again, this goes back to this feeling I always had that he was a teacher and that young people were important to him--he said something--I can't recall the exact words--"Don't you kids ever let me down like that." He felt terribly let down by Bobby Baker, who had been a young protege of Lyndon Johnson. He loved to have young proteges like Bill Moyers. That's about, I believe, historically accurate. What he said was, "Don't you kids ever let me down like that." He was crushed by the revelations that were coming up. I never met Bobby Baker.

G: I gather that LBJ was genuinely surprised by the revelations of Baker's activities?

N: Genuine surprise and shock, and hurt, very much hurt.

He was very mercurial with his personal staff. There were great ups and downs. Everybody had a love-hate complex all the time with him. He could send a secretary [home] in tears. I mean, the girl would go home at night in tears. She'd go home to find a dozen roses waiting for her, with no note, with no anything. That was his way of apology.

He once did that to me. I didn't go home in tears. I went home to write my resignation I was so angry. I felt mistreated. I was blamed for a dozen things that I didn't have anything to do with, leaks to the press. I didn't know what he was talking about. The man was under tremendous strain. He was under all kinds of pressure, the Russians, this, that and the other. It occurred to me very late that night that I was a whipping boy at that particular time. This was acceptable because I was inside personal staff, and we all had a great love for Lyndon Johnson. He could do this and work off his frustrations. As I told my fiancee at the time, better me than the Russian ambassador. If he blew his cookies at me it was much better than doing it with somebody who could blow up the world. The apology came the next morning when a White House staff car called for me at seven-thirty. I said, "I don't take a White House car to work." And he said, "Yes, sir, you're on the list." That was his way of apologizing, really. But there was never anything else said.

At the same time he demanded absolute loyalty. Part of being loyal is being ethical, personally ethical. He had a very, very deep sense of ethics, almost puritanical ethics. He once blew up at me when he came into my office at ten-thirty at night. I was paying my personal

bills. I put one of the checks, my phone bill or something, in a franked envelope. He just blew up. He said, "You can't do that. It's government property." He had this kind of honesty and ethics about him. If you let him down the way I think Bobby Baker [did]--he felt that Bobby Baker had let him down--you broke the code.

G: Did you ever get the impression that he had warned Baker against these sorts of conflicts of interest and told him he should get out of government if he was going to lobby or have a law practice? He never said anything to you about it?

N: No. What I know about it is his sense of his absolute anger and sense of being let down.

G: Did Lyndon Johnson, in the fall of 1963, plan to continue as vice president for another four years?

N: Yes.

G: He did? Did he ever talk about the possibility of just going back to Texas maybe and going into business or something?

N: Well, he always talked about going back to Texas, but I never had any impression that he planned to do anything but be on the ticket again.

G: Was there any doubt in his mind that President Kennedy wanted him to continue as vice president?

N: There was no doubt in his mind that President Kennedy wanted him to continue. He got the impression that others around Kennedy would have liked to have had somebody else. But I think most of that was just the inherent paranoia of Washington that goes beyond any president and any vice president. The whole city is one big mess of paranoids. But there

were plenty of Kennedy people who did not like Lyndon Johnson. He wasn't their style. Plenty of them--and some of them very vocal. But there was no question, at least to my knowledge, that either Jack Kennedy had any thoughts of changing the ticket or that Lyndon Johnson expected anything else but to run as vice president.

I was very much concerned about this dislike of the Kennedy people, some of them, for his style. Of course I had really come into government as a sort of Kennedy person, but I was always in the Johnson orbit, Bill Moyers the same way. We had close friends in the Kennedy White House, and we felt very bad about it. This was one reason why shortly before the assassination I had written a long memorandum to Mr. Johnson which didn't get read because the assassination intervened. But I was begging him to bring some intellectual East Coast Establishment kind of people into his circle.

G: Eric Goldman?

N: I was recommending Eric Goldman in particular.

G: Did you have him in mind?

N: Yes.

G: So this really predated his presidency?

N: Yes.

G: I didn't realize that. Is there anything else in the vice presidential period that we ought to talk about before we got on to presidential phase?

N: That brings us up to that day, I guess.

G: Where were you?

N: I was about to leave for Texas. George Reedy and I had some cleaning up to do in Washington on a couple of trips and speeches and so forth that Johnson was going to make when he returned from Texas. We were getting those squared away. Then I was to leave for Texas that evening and meet everybody at the Ranch when the teletypes started buzzing and we got the phone call from Texas that there had been an accident. That was the first thing we heard. Thereupon started the great shock of the assassination. We had first heard that Kennedy was alive, Johnson was dead. There was no clear news. We couldn't contact the party. We finally got the party at Parkland Hospital. Then there was the story that Johnson had a heart attack, because as he walked in the hospital he was hunched over holding his arm, because Rufus Youngblood hurt his shoulder when Youngblood pushed him to the floor of the car and sat on him.

Things became a blur at that point. I had certain military duties. I was still in the army at that time. I had certain rather vital military duties to get performed. I don't know whether they were all military, but things relating to the office of the presidency at that point. This was one of the greatest cultural shocks to anybody, to suddenly be no longer in the easy-going office of the vice president, to be in the Office of the President. I did certain things on my own that I didn't even know if it was in the manual or in the book, but just certain things occurred to me that had to be done that day.

G: Like what?

N: Well, they were coming back to Washington. Where was the President--Lyndon Johnson--going to go? I made the decision that he would go to the Executive Office Building, to the vice presidential office there. The Senate office was inappropriate, the Capitol office. The White House was certainly inappropriate. The usable office should be the Vice President's office at the Executive Office Building. Then there was a blur. The Elms had to be converted into a White House. We had to get telephone lines. We had two or three telephone lines and one hot line, but nothing like the president requires. I went over to the Executive Office Building. It just occurred to me that when Johnson came back to the capital city, he had to come back not as the vice president and not as the acting president, he had to come back as the president of the United States. The whole continuity, the whole government had to continue. Because this was always drummed into us in everything, the continuity of government, that the American people will carry on, will survive.

I went down to the basement with a White House guard and we got some presidential seals and an old presidential flag. We took down the vice presidential seals over the door, and the vice president's flag. Just the symbols, that when he walked into the Executive Office Building office, he was walking into the Office of the President, not the vice president. But the symbols were very important at that time. The shock was just unbelievable. I mean, it was a city in tears. We really didn't know what was going on. I don't think people in Texas knew what was going on.

Tape 2 of 3

G: We were talking about the measures that you took to assist in the transfer of power from the President to the Vice President.

N: Right.

G: When was the first time that you saw Lyndon Johnson after the assassination?

N: About fifteen minutes after he got back from Texas.

G: Where did you see him?

N: At the office. I was waiting for him at the Executive Office Building. He came directly from Andrews, as I recall. I think he made a quick stop at the Mansion with Mrs. Kennedy. Then he came to the Vice President's Office at the Executive Office Building. I said, "Hello, Mr. President." He was a bit in shock, but in total command. Total command.

G: How did you know that, that he was in total command?

N: Well, you could tell. I mean, just his bearing. He somehow appeared to me to have grown about seven, eight inches in the course of the day. He seemed bigger than when I saw him off on the plane to Texas.

G: What did he do those first few hours?

N: The first few hours were enormously traumatic and enormously difficult, because nothing worked. There were as many reporters trying to get in the door and government officials competing with telephone men trying to pull wires. We were trying to get enough telephones in there for Johnson's entire staff to occupy offices that had been occupied by four or five people prior. He was busy in his office. I was busy with not

knowing what I was doing. Everybody was really in a state of shock. I had my coat and tie off, and basically I was moving furniture, which was probably as therapeutic as anything else, because that's about what most of us were doing on the staff, arranging desks and chairs. Physical labor, I think, was probably the best therapy you could have been doing at that time. We certainly weren't running the country.

About two hours later I was summoned into the President's office for what was really a rather remarkable session. He called me in and he said, "Do we have any presidential stationery?" I said, "No, sir." We had White House stationery, and we had vice presidential stationery. We did not have any of the president's personal stationery, which is pale green and is used only for things signed by the president. We didn't have any. He said, "I want to write two letters and they should be on that stationery." I said, "I'll go get some," and I walked across the alley to the White House. The only place the president's stationery is kept is in the president's office. And of course everybody was in tears. It was going from a beehive of physical activity at the Executive Office Building, where we were trying to establish the presidency, to the mourning for the President across the street. Evelyn Lincoln was there. She was in tears. Everybody was. And I said, "Mrs. Lincoln, can I please have a box of the green presidential stationery?" Somebody, I don't know who it was, said, "The President is dead." And I said, "The President is across the street, and he would like some stationery."

The two letters he wrote were handwritten letters, one to John, Jr., and the other to Caroline. He wanted to set down his thoughts at that

time about how great a man their daddy was. He wanted to set them down at that moment in history, for those two children. I don't know if copies were ever made of those letters. I hand delivered them up to the Mansion later that evening. I don't know what became of the letters, or whether anybody got their hands on them to make a copy of them for the historical record. I don't know what they said. But I just thought it was typical of Lyndon Johnson that his thoughts were on these orphan children at that time, and that this was not for the public record. This was not for politics. This was not for anything else but those two kids, who'd lost their father, violently, that afternoon. Because I said--they were handwritten--"Do you want me to give them for copying?" He said, "No! You personally deliver them upstairs to the Mansion, and if Mrs. Kennedy is not there you give them to Mr. [J. B.] West, the chief usher. Those are for the children. And don't you shoot your mouth off that I wrote these letters," which I naturally did the next day.

But I thought this was just very typical of Lyndon Johnson. He chewed me out royally. I believe I told Bill Haddad about it the next day. Bill had been a friend of mine from the Peace Corps days, but he was then with the New York Herald Tribune. I believe I told Bill about it the next day, and of course it made the papers. Johnson was just furious with me. This was a personal thing. He really meant this [to be] of no significance except to those two children. But [it was] characteristic of the man, really.

Then we went on. I mean, later that night we all went back to The Elms.

G: You went back with him to The Elms?

N: Yes.

G: Who else was there, do you know?

N: George Reedy, Bill Moyers, Colonel Jackson, Walter Jenkins, Buzz.

G: Who did he call that night, do you remember, on the phone?

N: I know who I called. I don't know who [he called]. We finally got a navy corpsman in there to give him a massage and try to get him relaxed a little bit. But we also had the doctor in, because this was a strain on him all day. I know I called my parents. It's the first time that I'd had a chance all day to call them. Then I called a girl that I had a date with the next evening and told her I wouldn't be able to make it. Mr. Johnson picked up on that call upstairs--I was downstairs; he was upstairs. He said, "Dick, it's getting late. Who are you talking to?" I said, "Just a friend of mine," I don't believe I said Mr. President. He said, "Well, it's getting late. Let's all get a good night's sleep if we can," and he hung up. The girl I was talking to said, "Who was that?" I said, "That was the President of the United States." He was concerned about us getting some rest!

G: There was sort of a late dinner at The Elms, wasn't there? A bunch of you sitting around planning the next few days?

N: Yes. Yes.

G: What was decided then?

N: Basically it was decided that a) there would be no--at his specific request--moving into the White House. Really, it was more form than

substance, that we would not move into the White House. The family would not be moved out of the White House until Mrs. Kennedy was ready to move out. That no interruptions of anything that Kennedy had been doing would be tolerated by Mr. Johnson. That no changes in staff would be contemplated at the moment. Then certain plans for the funeral. At that time the State Department was really sort of taking over because nearly every leader of the world was coming to Washington, and Johnson, who had in my knowledge I believe met Haile Selassie and King Baudouin more socially than anything else, within the next forty-eight hours would be having high level meetings with nearly every chief of state in the world. The preparation of the man for those meetings was taking precedent over anything else. He had two primary levels of consciousness at that time: one of this historic next couple of days, the public man, and then the very private man of not upsetting Mrs. Kennedy, of not changing anything, of the memory of Jack Kennedy. He was as attentive to the little details about the Kennedy family as he was about the visit of the English prime minister. The next few days were like that.

G: Did he talk about the assassination? Did he speculate on whether or not it was a conspiracy or anything like that?

N: Yes. Of course we were all under the belief at that time that it was a conspiracy.

G: What did he say? Do you remember his words?

N: I don't remember exactly. That night there was still too many loose ends on the case, but we were still under the impression that this was

something a lot more international and bigger than it turned out to be. I mean, we were on red alert. The silos were open and SAC was doing its thing. The guards in Washington were ten feet thick. We were still under the impression that this might be the beginning of some sort of just terrible cataclysmic kind of international takeover.

G: Did he have any contingency plan in case this were the case, I mean for himself? Was he going to stay at The Elms at that event?

N: He was going to stay right where he was and do his job. You know, the military was hovering and generals were coming and going, and admirals. They wanted to move him to the secret mountain.

G: Did they really?

N: Yes. They wanted to bunker. He wouldn't have any of that crap.

G: Do you remember that conversation in particular?

N: Just what he said. He said, "We're all going to work right here. We'll work in the EOB. We have to calm this country down. If I let them put me in some concrete canyon somewhere, we'll just scare the crap out of this world. It's just not going to be." So we fought the morning rush hour in Washington from The Elms to the White House every morning. He was going to see people. He was going to walk, and he was going to shake hands. He was not about to be locked away in a mountain, even if it was some international conspiracy. He said, "We can beat that. We can't beat breaking this country apart."

G: He, of course, right away appointed the Warren Commission.

N: Yes.

G: Did you have any observation here with regard to [the commission]?

N: This was a part of the calming process, hopefully, to appoint the most blue ribbon of blue ribbon objective people to really get to the bottom of who killed Jack Kennedy, and to make this in the form of a national commission. Well, maybe we were commission-crazy in those days. I think Lyndon Johnson believed that a blue ribbon commission was the answer to a lot of problems. And he probably was not that wrong. But nobody was going to believe anybody unless you could get enough believeable people to get to the bottom of the matter. That's why the Warren Commission was formed, to really get to the facts, to make them public and have enough credible people confirm it whatever the outcome was going to be. By that time the lone assassin theory had taken hold, that this was a lone crackpot which was even more difficult a situation to handle than if it was an international plot to take over the United States. It's far more incredible for the American people to believe that one nut killed the President of the United States than if this was some plot masterminded in the Kremlin, and was part of a James Bond kind of activity. Because how can one crackpot do something like that? We all know that that's the only way you can do it, really. The only absolute nonprotection the President has is from some crackpot that doesn't have any plans.

G: Did the fact that it happened in Texas disturb him?

N: It hurt him very deeply, hurt him very deeply. He was a Texan. The President was killed in his home state. He acceded to power following the death of the President in his home state. It was almost as if Texas let him down.

G: Sure. You took him his night reading, I understand. Can you describe that process?

N: We would cull the most important documents that would come in during the day. The President's day was filled with a lot more form than substance, formalities of the office. Of course, there were important meetings and phone calls and things all day, but the really substantive meaty, weighty problems were reduced to memorandum form. The only time he really could get his work done was late at night. He'd lie in bed and read these memoranda. Maybe that's why, to this day, I do all of my work late at night. I sort of adopted his philosophy about this. But these things would be prepared in a huge folder. The man would lie in bed and read these things. More often than not, he'd have his bedside lamp on and Mrs. Johnson would have the cover over her head trying to go to sleep. Midnight, one, two in the morning, he's still pouring through these documents and calling people.

G: Would you be there with him when he was going through these documents?

N: When it was my duty to do so, yes, I'd be there. He would just go through them all and check off, "yes," "no," "see me." Or he would say, "Call McNamara and tell him I want to see him tomorrow afternoon on this." And you'd make a note and then you'd go and do it. You'd try and get it all done that night. Sometimes decisions seemed irrational but in retrospect [it was] as practical as any other decision-making process. The night he chose the chief of staff of the Army--I think Earle Wheeler had been chief of staff and had been promoted to chairman of the Joint Chiefs [of Staff]. The Army had to pick a new

chief of staff. There was a top urgent from McNamara for the President to make the final decision. They had reduced it to four or five generals, all of four-star rank, and biographies attached. Johnson was to make the final decision on the chief of staff from the top cut of maybe four or five men.

He started to look through the biographies and he said, "Are they all carbon copies of the same one?" I said, "What do you mean, Mr. President?" He said, "Well, they're all exactly alike. West Point. . . ." The backgrounds of these men were remarkably the same. He said, "I don't know any of them. Do you know any of them?" I said, "Yes. I have met General [Harold K.] Johnson." He said, "What do you think of him?" I said, "He's a very fine man." He said, "Call him and tell him he's chief of staff." (Laughter) Which I did. I was no longer in the military at that point. General Johnson had remembered me as a lieutenant and thought I was drunk and in trouble, calling him at midnight at Fort Myer. I kept trying to tell him that the President wanted to speak to him. He thought I was at some wild party, but finally understood that he had been named chief of staff of the Army.

G: Did the President talk to him on that occasion?

N: Oh, yes.

G: That's fascinating. Are there any other decisions that you witnessed in that first year?

N: Oh, there were so many. The civil rights thing really became critically important. The situation in Southeast Asia continued to deteriorate. The major decisions that were being made were being handled very

competently, I thought, by the President. I was always fascinated to watch, again like a student. The President used to always tell me, "Come along and learn something." I was more observer than [participant].

G: What was the White House staff like at this point? Was there a lot of politics, infighting, among aides?

N: Oh, yes. I imagine [that's true of] all White House staffs in history. I mentioned before the rampant paranoia. There was always infighting.

G: What were the factions? Were there discernible sides?

N: Well, there was the Jenkins faction, although that was sort of left as an inviolate faction.

G: Why was that?

N: Because Walter Jenkins was really Lyndon Johnson's alter ego. He was too close, too much at the top. He was above the infighting, really.

G: Did he try to shield things from Johnson?

N: No.

G: Do you think he provided open access for the other factions?

N: Yes. Jenkins told the President everything. It wasn't a [H. R.] Haldeman kind of "Close the President's door. Tell me." Walter Jenkins took shorthand. Everybody who called him, everybody who wrote him, everybody who appealed to Jenkins to do this, to do that, everything was meticulously recorded in shorthand. Then he would spend an hour, hour and a half, on the phone with the President, and they would go over every detail, to what color toilet paper they were going to use in the mess in some part of the world. If you wanted to get to Johnson and you got to Jenkins, you got to Johnson.

G: I've heard that Jenkins was really the only one that could actually speak for him. That if you got a yes or a no from Jenkins--

N: That was it. That was it. It was an alter ego situation. If Jenkins said this was it, that was it. It would be as if the President had made the decision, because they thought exactly alike.

That was another tremendous shock, the Jenkins affair.

G: You were around then, weren't you?

N: Yes. Yes.

G: Can you recall, from your perspective, what happened?

N: Factually what happened according to the record, Jenkins had gone to a party at Newsweek for the opening of their new offices. It was well known that he was going to attend that. I was in the White House working on the polls. About, I don't know, eleven o'clock, ten-thirty, Walter came back to the White House, looking ashen, something terribly wrong. He went into his office, sat down at his desk, and he came out, looked at me and said, "What you doing here so late?" I said, "I'm waiting for Lou Harris to call with the polls," the Harris poll. He said, "I'm going home." I said, "Did anybody ring for a White House car for you?" He said, "No. I'll walk." I said, "You can't walk. You live ten miles from here." He said, "I'll get a cab." And he left.

The next day we learned what had happened, that he had left the party, gone to the YMCA, had been arrested in the men's room. The shock was every bit as great as the shock of the assassination. To this day I am convinced that this was a conspiracy. This was a very

dangerous act that was put together in the Goldwater campaign team. This was very, very rough politics.

G: Why do you feel that it was a conspiracy, or a dirty trick?

N: Dirty trick would be the current buzzword for it. The facts. He'd gone to that party. He'd had several drinks. He received a phone call at that party. Now, Katharine Graham, I believe it was, called Walter to the phone; he'd had a phone call. We had checked later, and the phone call had not originated at the White House nor had it come through the White House switchboard. There would have been a record of that call. Now, anybody who wanted to reach Jenkins would call the White House and the operators would find him and patch in. So this was somebody who called him. He has no memory of that phone call, at least according to the record--I say had no record of that phone call. But he did [receive one]. There were witnesses that he had received a phone call, and he left the premises shortly thereafter. He has no memory of that. He had had three martinis, again, according to the record. He left the party, without his wife, and moments thereafter was arrested at the YMCA.

It would have been terribly easy to rig something--put something in his drink; tell him that there was some critical thing, to meet somebody downstairs; that in a state of stupor, put him in a compromising position. Police had been told to stand by, told that something was going to occur at the YMCA, and to take him away and have him booked. This man was not a pervert. I used to play golf with him. His close

friends, you know, senior FBI people, congressmen, four or five hundred people were interviewed and said this is not Walter Jenkins.

Now, the psychiatrist said it could be the Samson Syndrome. He was under such tremendous pressure that it goes beyond being suicidal, and it's tear down the walls of the temple, do something [terrible]. If he had been under psychotic pressure, and he had just killed himself, he would have hurt only himself [but if] he does something despicable, he would tear down the walls of the temple. I forget who coined the phrase--which shrink coined the phrase, "the Samson Syndrome." That's a possibility. That's a medical, psychiatric explanation for what happened. The only other explanation--because it was not in the nature of this man--was that it was rigged. It was a dirty trick. Now, a lot of people shared my belief. Mr. Johnson, to my knowledge.

G: Why? Did he talk to you about that? What did he say?

N: Yes. He said this wasn't Walter Jenkins. He said somebody did this.

G: I gather he was in New York when the story broke out?

N: Yes.

G: Do you recall who informed him of it?

N: Mrs. Johnson.

G: She did? Where were you? You weren't with him?

N: No. I was in the White House. We called Mrs. Johnson.

G: Who called her?

N: I think Abe Fortas, or somebody, and wanted her to tell him. Nobody else. It was too personal, too devastating. And she sat him down, made him lie

down, and she told him. I mean, it was a devastating blow.

G: Then I suppose there was some discusion between him and Mrs. Johnson about what they should do. Do you remember that, or do you know anything about that? Abe Fortas and Clark Clifford, I understand, tried to persuade the publishers not to print the story, at least until they had more facts.

N: Yes.

G: Do you recall that? They went to several of the publishers.

N: I think that's true.

(Interruption)

But it was printed and then shortly forgotten. I think the Chinese exploded a hydrogen bomb and Khrushchev was thrown out of power in the next three days. There were two monumental international incidents that took over the front pages shortly thereafter. But one reason why it was never pursued down to the bottom as to whether or not this was in fact a dirty trick was because Mr. Johnson said, "Let it die. Let's not drag this out. Let's not look like we're going into the counter-offensive dirty trick business."

But there were a number of people who shared my thought. My thoughts, basically, were picked up from other people, among them J. Edgar Hoover, who did not believe that Walter Jenkins knowingly and willingly committed this thing. The fact that J. Edgar Hoover went to visit him in the hospital sort of proved that J. Edgar Hoover didn't believe this garbage.

G: Did Jenkins' sudden absence create a void in the White House?

N: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

G: And was there competition to fill it?

N: Oh, yes.

G: What happened?

N: There was Jack Valenti, and there was Bill Moyers, and Marvin Watson came in at that time. Nobody really filled it. Nobody really filled it. There were then like three chiefs of staff, but nobody really filled Walter's void, because you couldn't. The man was an alter ego. Nobody held that position with Lyndon Johnson.

G: Could you see the tension between George Reedy and Bill Moyers at this point?

N: Oh, well, yes. But there was some tension, a great deal, on the whole handling of the press with Johnson. George was also getting tired.

G: How would you describe the Moyers-Johnson relationship?

N: Well, in earlier years it was probably like mine with the President, a student-teacher kind of thing.

G: Father-son?

N: No, avuncular, a favorite nephew and uncle kind of thing. I don't believe that Mr. Johnson thought that Bill was the son he never had. That's PR. I think he looked on Bill as a favorite nephew, as a guy of great imagination and vigor and everything that Johnson liked, you know, honesty and ethics. He was very fond of Bill.

G: What was Moyers attitude toward Lyndon Johnson?

N: Until the Vietnam thing, very avuncular, like his favorite uncle and like a great leader who Bill could help mold policy with. And Bill did

have a feel for this thing. When the Vietnam thing got beyond the bounds of what Bill could take, Bill started getting more pressure on him. But until that time it was a very, very close fondness between the two. And the President tended to listen to Bill, listen to his judgment. By the time these things occurred I was not inside the big house there, so I didn't see a lot of things that were going on on a daily basis.

G: While you were there, did you see any evidence of what George Reedy describes in his book, The Twilight of the Presidency, as a certain isolation created by the aides?

N: There is always a tendency to isolate the presidency. Certainly the more professional aides--and I will put Joe Califano and Bill in the professional category--would tend to shield the President more than the old-time staff, which would just blab to the President about anything, you know, about a problem a secretary was having with her boy friend, or a bill before Congress, whatever it was, the old-line staff. Of course, Bill was old-line staff but then very professional. There was a tendency in the professionals to handle their area and to shield the President. I think [they would] shield as opposed to isolate. You know, [they felt] that he didn't have to be asked on every point.

But in my experience it was categorically impossible to isolate Lyndon Johnson. A Richard Nixon you could isolate. You couldn't isolate Lyndon Johnson because he stuck his nose into everything. He'd prowl around, you know, come over and read everything on your desk.

He'd open the drawers. He wanted to know everything that was going on. You couldn't isolate him. The person you didn't want to [have] reach him on the telephone, like as not he'd get a call from Lyndon Johnson within the next twelve hours anyway, so you couldn't isolate him.

G: This is a chronology here of that first year, and it continues on through here. Why don't you just glance over that and see if there's anything that triggers memories for you.

You've talked about initially having the idea to bring Eric Goldman on. Is there anything that you want to add to that? Of course it was done. Evidently the President called him in November, 1963.

N: Yes. We were having some problems with White House historians, Arthur Schlesinger being as close as one could find to a White House historian at that time. Eric Goldman was the man I wanted around the President. Eric had been my professor at Princeton and he just had a fantastic grasp of modern American history. From the standpoint of history, of Johnson knowing where he was currently in the great scheme of American history and what the future might show looking at recent American history, this man was ideal as a counselor for the President. In addition to that, Eric Goldman wrote beautifully. He wrote readable things. This was the kind of mind I thought that Johnson desperately needed around him. I mean, this was establishment. This was Ivy League. This was the kind of professorial advice that would be enormously helpful to Johnson, who was a bit insular.

At that first meeting, Eric Goldman lectured Lyndon Johnson for one hour on American history. I had seen Johnson throw people out of

his office after three minutes. The President was fascinated! He was fascinated. Finally, after about an hour or so, Eric stood up and he said, "I am taking up too much of your time, Mr. President. I've been rambling on." Johnson said, "I could listen to you all day."

G: Was he talking about the New Deal period?

N: He started at the New Deal and he came right up to present day. Then he told Lyndon Johnson where he thought Lyndon Johnson stood in the ever expanding history of America.

G: Where was that?

N: With the opportunity to really move forward with programs that had been left undone, the civil rights movement, the Supreme Court, the idea of bringing excellence back into American life. That's how a number of programs got started, like the Presidential Scholars program, the White House Fellows program, to recognize excellence and to move forward on the programs that were really critically important to the United States, especially in civil rights. Johnson had an opportunity to do this because first of all, Johnson was a consummate politician. He understood the legislative process as no president has ever understood it. He was a creature of the legislature, now occupying the chief executive position, and in a unique position to get his programs accomplished. Then the question was what programs should be accomplished. There are a number of memoranda that came out during and after that meeting that should be available, I assume, to the [LBJ] Library. The initial thing was the creation of what we call the quiet brain trust, QBT. That was my nickname for [it].

G: Who else was in on it?

N: Well, that was Goldman's job, to assemble the quiet brain trust. This was not a big, flashy commission. These were people like Edwin Land of Polaroid, Patricia Harris, Paul Ylvisaker. There are lists of these people who were brought into the White House for these bull sessions.

G: Did they meet together? Did they meet often?

N: Goldman met with them individually. He solicited them for their ideas of things that ought to be done. He brought them together in the White House.

G: Did they meet with the President as a group?

N: On occasions, yes.

G: Well, what happened to Eric Goldman? I know what happened, of course, but why did it happen?

N: There was a lot of internal rivalry. There were a number of attempts to isolate Goldman from the President.

G: Attempts by whom?

N: Other members of the staff, and I'm not clear exactly which members of the staff were doing this, but primarily people who didn't want Eric Goldman that close to the President because they thought they were the intellectual advisers to the President. There were others in his staff who highly supported the Goldman position. People like George Reedy and Horace Busby were really on Goldman's side. The old guard was really on Goldman's side. It was the professionals who. . . .

G: I gather that the White House Arts Festival was really the. . . .

N: That was the low point in my government career. (Laughter) That was when Mr. Johnson stopped referring to Eric Goldman as "my professor," and started referring to him as "your professor."

G: Do you want to talk about that?

N: That was a disaster, not in concept, but because the President was embarrassed. Somebody came in and, as he would say, "pissed on his carpet."

G: Half of them tried to insult him by staying away and the other half tried to insult him by coming.

N: In person, yes. It was an embarrassment for the President. That allowed the long knives to come out for Eric, from the professionals who said, "I told you so. You can't listen to these professors."

G: Do you think that Johnson needed a historian?

N: Not a historian.

G: Or an academician?

N: Yes. Yes. He certainly did, and better a historian than a philosopher or a psychologist, and a good historian, because [he needed] a prospective, really. But, yes, he absolutely needed an academician, more than one. He didn't have enough academicians. Not that academicians know how to run the country but they add a certain quiet imperativeness to the government process.

G: Were you a casualty of that as well as Eric Goldman?

N: No. I had already been sent out on assignment for the President. I was, at that time, a special assistant to the Secretary of Housing,

White House liaison with the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, which had just been created. I had also been recently married, and we were planning to leave Washington for New York.

There was a time, of course, [when] the President and Eric weren't talking, and they would only talk through me. The President would call up me and say, "What is he up to?" I would call Eric and say, "Eric, what you up to?" Eric would say, you know, "Tell the President. . . ." I was like the maid in a husband and wife quarrel. There was great fondness between the two. I was like a domestic in a house where a husband and wife were fighting, and the wife would tell the maid to tell the husband, back and forth, back and forth. It ended with the resignation of--

(Interruption)

G: It ended with the resignation of Eric Goldman.

N: Yes, and his announcement that he was going to write a book called The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson.

G: Which of course he did.

N: He did indeed. And I think it's a fine history of the administration. The President called me and said, "What the hell does he mean, "The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson?" I explained that that was the Greek classic drama reference, that a tragic figure was a good person caught in circumstances beyond his control.

(Interruption)

G: Had he read the book?

N: I'm sure he did.

G: Oh, really?

N: Yes.

G: Why do you think that?

N: Because he was interested in anything that Eric Goldman had to say. I know he read it, because he mentioned it, that it was quite flattering. And it was. It was a flattering book, I believe, to Lyndon Johnson. It's not unflattering.

G: My impression is that he was very sensitive to criticism in books about himself.

N: Oh, yes. He was a very thin-skinned person when it came to anything written about him. But The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson is not [unflattering]. First of all, it's an enormously accurate history. It's not a keyhole history. It really isn't. It's not an instant history, because Goldman himself is not an instant historian. He's a current American historian. He's a chronicler of what's happening now. As he says, his field of academicia is ever expanding, because it's current American history. I think it's a very flattering book. I think Johnson comes off very well in that book, and Eric Goldman has a high regard for Lyndon Johnson. Some people didn't share that philosophy. I did, but I'm a Goldman fan.

G: Anything else in that chronology before we get to the 1964 campaign?

N: It was a busy year, wasn't it? You forget all these things.

Ah, yes, the War on Poverty. The Appalachian visit, that was my trip.

G: Did you go on that?

N: I advanced it and went on it.

G: What was he like on that trip?

N: Well, he was really deeply moved by a lot of the things he saw there. But they were things that were not unknown to him. It was almost maybe his own memories of the Depression era in Texas. He felt a great kindred spirit with the people. I'm talking about the little people that he met in the hollows of West Virginia. He related to them, and they related to him. He wasn't some strange creature from outer space who happened to be the president of the United States. He was very moved. Mrs. Johnson was very moved. She made her own tour afterwards of that, did her trip.

G: Did he talk about--

N: Having to do something for these people.

G: --what he could do?

N: That was the problem: what he could do. But something had to be done. I guess that's when the War on Poverty, which was quickly changed to War against Poverty, came into being. That's when a lot of the--well, one of the problems with Eric Goldman, he had some of his own thoughts about that. There was another former Kennedy speech writer who was brought in at that point, who was anti-Eric Goldman.

G: Was that Dick Goodwin?

N: Yes.

G: Can you tell me anything about the genesis of the Head Start Program or the genesis of Vista?

N: No. I really wasn't involved with those. They all were generated after the times I was down there.

G: Any anecdotes on that trip to Appalachia?

N: I can't recall any specific instances.

(Interruption)

He would have mentioned it. The U.S.S. Maddox was where I got involved with Vietnam, on August 4. There had been a friend of mine who had been sent out to do the investigation, who was at that time a deputy assistant secretary of defense. Alvin Friedman was sent to interview the people on the Maddox to find out if we really were attacked. The answer was, "Yes, we really were." The North Vietnamese denied it, but Johnson didn't rely on anything except sending a personal observer to check the facts. Al Friedman went out there and established that it was true. I started to get more involved.

Of course, at this point we were all very busy with the campaign from this until November. My principal job was the polls, which were done on a daily basis. It was a compendium of every poll being taken in the United States, graphs and charts and photographs. It was poll mania. The President consistently blamed me if he dropped a point somewhere.

G: Did he?

N: Yes. It was all my fault. I had personally gone out and interviewed these people and got them to change their vote. I don't think he really believed the polls. They were all showing what was going to happen, that he was just going to trounce Goldwater. There was just no way. But this was a great reinforcement for his ego. Because, after

all, he had not been elected president. The fact that he was carrying the country the way he did was a tremendous boost for his jovialness.

G: Do you think he wanted a hundred per cent?

N: Oh, sure he wanted a hundred per cent. Every politician wants a hundred per cent.

G: But he more than any other.

N: Yes, but he would settle for 62. He told me he would have settled for 50 1/2, but I kept telling him he would get a lot more than that.

G: Was he glad that Goldwater was the Republican nominee?

N: Yes. Very much so.

G: What did he say about that?

N: He said he could run against Barry Goldwater, but he couldn't run against his own staff and we all [should] keep our mouths shut, and that nobody but he would do any speaking during the campaign. That was one of his problems with Hubert Humphrey. He had me call Humphrey one evening. We were listening to a speech made by Humphrey. Because Humphrey used to refer to himself in the third person, you know, "Hubert Humphrey would do this." He made me get him on the phone one night. He said, "Hubert, would you stop talking about yourself like you're not there. Nobody knows who the hell Hubert Humphrey is. They don't think it's you. You keep talking about some guy named Hubert Humphrey." (Laughter)

Then there was the night we did a fourteen-city stop from six in the morning until twelve at night, and the next morning the only thing that got headlines was Jack Valenti's car had caught on fire in one of the motorcades, and that got all the headlines.

G: That would have upset him.

N: Yes. That's when he said that he could run against any Republican alive. He'd certainly beat Barry Goldwater, and he could run against the entire GOP, but he could not run against his own staff. Would we kindly have our cars burn up in private somewhere. (Laughter)

G: I gather he was not really a happy warrior on the campaign trail.

N: No. It was very serious business. Hubert Humphrey would come back--sometimes there would be joint trips, we'd all get back just tail-dragging. Johnson would be grumpy. His hands would be bleeding from shaking hands, literally bloody, and tired, everybody miserable. And Humphrey would come in bubbling over, "Ha, ha, ha," he said, "Somebody stole my watch in Akron this afternoon. They ripped off my cufflinks. Ha, ha, ha. I had a wonderful, wonderful time, and we're going to go tomorrow morning, gang." Everybody would look at this madman, Humphrey and say, "What is he taking? We've got to get a prescription for it if he's taking anything." Because this was unreal. This man had unbelievable vitality. Johnson did, too, but he got tired at night. Because they were backbreaking trips.

G: Where did you go with him in 1964 in the campaign?

N: Northeast.

G: He came up and campaigned for Robert Kennedy, didn't he?

N: Yes.

G: Were you here in New York?

N: Yes. I went as far south as my hometown, Norfolk, Virginia, and as far north as Boston and as far west as Appalachia. I was involved in that really from a geographic standpoint.

G: Do you have any insights on his trip here to New York?

N: Not really. All the trips really blur in looking back on them, especially the campaign trips, because if this is 2:00 p.m. Tuesday, this must be Huntington, West Virginia.

G: I gather that when he got to New Orleans he was rather irritable or upset about something?

N: Well, that's where his speech was that lives in my memory as the only memorable thing in the whole campaign. He was irritated. . . . Well, Louisiana irritated him. He was going to lose Louisiana by such an enormous margin, it appeared. Goldwater was beginning to get on his nerves, and the war was beginning to get on his nerves. He knew it was coming, and he did not want to scare the people. He was running against a hawk.

G: Do you think that made him more hawkish than he might have been otherwise?

N: No. No. I don't. Because he wasn't hawkish. This was not something he wanted to do. I think he had to respond more forcefully, perhaps, on occasions. I'm talking about in Southeast Asia. It didn't really heat up till after the election anyway. There had been incidents, like the Maddox in August. There were those like Barry Goldwater [who] after the election made a statement that, "People said during the campaign that if you voted for Barry Goldwater we'd have a big war in Southeast Asia." Goldwater said, "I voted for Barry Goldwater, and it's true. We have a war in Southeast Asia."

G: Did you have any observations regarding the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution?

N: Yes. It was extremely important to the President that he acted with the advice and consent of the Congress. Now again, he was a legislative creature, and he wanted the support of the legislature. He loved the legislative branch. He wanted it on the record that whatever he had to do, he had the consent of the Congress.

G: Do you recall any discussions that he had with Senator Fulbright or others during this?

N: They always closed the door. I remember he wasn't too happy with Fulbright.

G: Why? During the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution?

N: Yes, during that whole period he didn't really trust Fulbright completely.

G: What did he say, do you remember?

N: I have no idea why he felt that way.

G: Let's talk about the selection of the vice president in 1964.

N: That happened at lunch.

G: Did he rule out Robert Kennedy right away? Was there ever any serious consideration?

N: There was no serious consideration of Kennedy. I think the final decision on who was going to be the vice presidential candidate occurred at a luncheon that I was privy to be with, up in the Mansion, with Arthur Goldberg, Jack Valenti, and. . . . I'm trying to think who else was there. I think that may have been it. I had just finished lunch at the White House Mess when the President called me up to the Mansion to have

lunch. The way we did things there, he called me and said, "Have you eaten yet?" I lied. I said, "Of course not." He said, "Come on up and bring the polls." Then he had me recite for Arthur Goldberg his pairing with all the potential vice presidential candidates, how he fared against the Republican team with Eugene McCarthy as a running mate, with Hubert Humphrey, with Bobby Kennedy. There were three or four others.

G: [Senator Thomas] Dodd was one, I guess.

N: Yes, Dodd, and some of them too ridiculous to contemplate. He went down in the polls in every pairing with the exception of Hubert Humphrey. Humphrey didn't add any votes, didn't take away any votes. He kept us all in absolute suspense. We made phone calls there from the dining room. He wanted Dodd standing by. Eugene McCarthy we couldn't get on the telephone. He wanted Humphrey standing by.

G: What did he say about not being able to get McCarthy on the phone? Do you remember?

N: Something about that being typical or something.

G: Why do you think the decision was made right then?

N: I think he had made the decision right then.

G: Just on the basis of the polls?

N: That, and I think he just had good vibes with Hubert Humphrey. They got along beautifully. They were a pair. He was very comfortable with Humphrey. He wasn't comfortable with McCarthy. Dodd was a joke; that was never a serious thing.

G: Oh, it wasn't?

N: No. Bobby Kennedy he knew he couldn't exist with. It would have been a reverse role of the way he was before. Humphrey was a man of imagination, of political skill, a genuinely good human being. I think that impressed Johnson more than anything else. Hubert Humphrey was a good human being. In every fiber of his being he was good and Johnson liked that. He liked that vitality. He used to annoy him sometimes, but he liked it. He liked the bubble. He may have, in his heart, made the decision before, but I think he really was convinced by the polls that Humphrey was right for the ticket. Let me put it another way, that Johnson's instinct was justified by the polls.

G: So Humphrey was notified?

N: Just to stand by. When we got to Atlantic City he told him.

G: Did the President confide in you what he was going to do?

N: No. I asked him. I said, "Who's it going to be?"

G: He said, "You'll see."

N: I said, "Come on. You can tell me. I'm not going to blab." He said, "You will." (Laughter) "You'll shoot your mouth right off. You'll go right downstairs and call Sarah McClendon or somebody. I'm not going to tell you."

He actually started bringing them in. We brought in Dodd, flew him in by helicopter. We brought in Humphrey. We brought in these people to Washington, to the White House. Then everybody went up together to Atlantic City, [I] carrying my polls with me in a huge artist's case about five feet by five feet. I was getting a double hernia carrying around these things. I said, "Why do you want me to

bring them?" He said, "Just in case we need them." I said, "I've got a pocket compilation." He said, "No, no. Bring the whole case."

So we went to Atlantic City, which was my only trip there. He named Humphrey, and Humphrey gave a great speech, I believe, at that. But he kept referring to Hubert Humphrey and that was the beginning of one of the annoyances.

G: Anything else on the campaign?

N: I can't think of any. We had lots of visits and meetings. A lot of times he would call me in just to go over the current polls with people from every walk of life, reporters to financiers.

G: Some of the campaign spots got pretty nasty, didn't they, on both sides?

N: The television spots?

G: Yes.

N: Yes. The little girl with the ice cream cone I guess was the most devastating. That's as close as we ever got to dirty tricks. I have to say that I do believe that the other side engaged in some dirty tricks, and a lot of those people later ended up in the Nixon White House, to show their mentality.

G: Did you have knowledge of any other Goldwater tricks, other than the ones we referred to?

N: If that was one, and I don't think that Barry Goldwater had anything to do with it. I want to make that clear. I think Barry Goldwater is an enormously decent human being. Johnson felt that way, too. It was

the crowd around him that were pretty sleazy. But I don't know of any dirty tricks. Our dirty tricks amounted to good natured practical joking. That's as far as it went. There was that guy who--

G: Dick Tuck?

N: Dick Tuck. That was the level of our dirty trick, which was really college boy pranking as opposed to really nasty political stuff.

G: Did the President--?

N: He loved Dick Tuck.

G: Did he really?

N: Yes.

G: Tuck was very imaginative, wasn't he?

N: Oh, fantastic. But this is the kind of thing that appealed to Lyndon Johnson because it was good natured, and it was not devastating. It was, I think, similar to maybe the English air ministry in World War II. They couldn't tolerate RAF pilots doing anything wrong, but they used to love when RAF pilots did some pranking on their bombing raids, dropping pornographic leaflets, messages written on the bombs, that kind of pranking. Dick Tuck brought a little humor to a very humorless campaign.

G: Can you recall anything specifically that he did?

N: Oh, he jumped in the lead car, the point car, police car in the Goldwater motorcade in Los Angeles. The policeman who was to drive the point car said, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm Goldwater's aide. Follow my direction." He drove him around Los Angeles for about an hour and a half. Everybody was just following the point car. (Laughter) The

thing he did with the Nixon campaign in Chinatown, with the big Chinese sign that said, "What about the Hughes Tool Company loan?" in Chinese, that kind of thing. He really amused the President, because it was good natured.

G: Would the President recount some of these Tuck stories? I know there were a lot of them.

N: Oh, yes. He used to like to hear them. We would hear about them after the fact. He thought they were real good knee-slapping fun, because otherwise it was a very boring campaign. The only thing unboring were the television spots and Dick Tuck.

G: The podium had to be just the right height during the campaign?

N: Yes, they had to be exactly the right [height]. Well, let me say that that was more a figment of an aide's imagination than any peculiarity on the part of the President. We thought it had to be exactly the right height, and we thought that the microphones had to be just so. But he really didn't care.

G: Why do you say that?

N: Because I made a lot of mistakes myself on podium height and so forth and so on, and he just didn't care. We cared. We built up the myth that everything had to be exactly perfectly so, which happens I guess in all presidential aides. He wouldn't care if there was no podium at all or if he had to stoop over.

G: Anything else on the campaign?

N: No, I can't remember. We sought no wider war, just a long, skinny war.

G: The President was particularly interested, it seems, in the polls in California. Is that right?

N: Yes. He was interested in all over. California he felt was a big swing state and uncontrollable.

G: Did you travel with him to California then?

N: No. No, I didn't go on there.

I was just trying to see when we bombed the Pleiku barracks. I can't find that. That's when I was sent to the War Room. Yes, February 7.

G: Do you want to talk about that?

N: I was seconded to McNamara's staff for a while. My job was really to be the President's eyes and ears in the Pentagon, to the best extent possible. Not a spy so much as somebody who would be unafraid to call the President at two in the morning, as he phrased it. Because he knew down in the bowels of the Pentagon, in the National Military Command Center, that it's chain of command. He was a man who liked to be instantly informed. My job was, if there is something that I thought the President ought to hear about, to pick up the phone and call.

G: Did you ever do it?

N: Oh, yes.

G: What did you call him about?

N: Oh, incidents that looked like they could blow out of proportion. He also wanted to be called directly and immediately when the planes returned from the bombing missions. He wanted a count of losses, U.S. losses.

G: Did you call him about those?

N: Yes. He wanted to know if all the planes got back; if they didn't, how many men did we lose. This is what made him a very old man.

G: How often would you call him about these missions?

N: When I was there on duty, every day that I was there on duty.

G: You were going to talk about the barracks bombing.

N: That was after that. February 7 is when we ordered first air strikes against North Vietnam, continuing air strikes. There was great fear on his part that by doing this we would precipitate Red Chinese intervention, a much bigger war.

You know, there's something I've never seen referred to any way. I was very disillusioned by the Vietnam War, because I couldn't find any reason for it. I've never seen a reference to what he very deeply felt. He said something to me once that Red China was at that time undergoing all sorts of upheavals, the Red Guard and so forth, and that it was exhibiting the kind of militancy that the Russians exhibited fifteen, twenty years before, ten years before. He said to me--it was just in passing--"You know, we have got to keep pressure in Southeast Asia. The Russians have got to keep pressure on the Manchurian border. We have to contain the Red Chinese until they settle down. Ten years from now an American president will visit China." It was almost ten years later that Nixon went to Peking. But he deeply felt--and this was one of the reasons why he kept us in that war, I believe--that if we could bring sufficient pressure on the Chinese, that eventually the

Chinese would become a trading partner as opposed to a militancy situation, with the danger of a world war.

G: Domestic unrest creates international conflict.

N: But I've never seen a reference to this.

G: In this case international conflict created domestic unrest as well.

N: Yes. I just think it was a dreadful war.

At some point during the war years Lester Pearson, [who] was prime minister of Canada, had come down to Temple University in Philadelphia to get an honorary doctorate. He made a speech. I was on call the next morning. The President was in the bedroom going through the morning papers and reading Pearson's speech where he came down very hard on the President's Vietnam policy. Johnson asked if he was still in the country. We found out that he was still in Philadelphia. So Johnson asked us to get him on the telephone. We got the Prime Minister on the phone, and the President took the phone. He said, "Lester, I don't care what you say in your own country, but don't come down here pissing on my carpet." Pearson got the point, but it was good natured enough to be diplomatic. I think we should probably mention something about Johnson's vocabulary being very rough, but well done.

G: Anything on the 1964 Civil Rights Act that you recall?

N: One meeting, which was in the projection room. It was held in the projection room at the White House. The President had called together all the civil rights leaders, all the black civil rights leaders. Martin Luther King was there and A. [Philip] Randolph, and the head of the NAACP.

He had them all in the room, about eight or ten of the black leaders. He was exhorting them to keep the peace and keep the lid on any violence. That's the only way they were going to get the laws passed--peaceably. It was about Thanksgiving time, I believe, or close to it. He said he wanted each of them to go out and get to work on congressmen and get out the vote, and keep the lid on things.

We finished the meeting and I was sort of bringing up the rear. I heard two of the black civil rights leaders talking. The President was leading the parade down the corridor of the White House, and the group was following. One of them said, "That man is something else. I just believe anything he tells me. If he told me to go out and join the Ku Klux Klan right now, I would." (Laughter)

G: Do you know which one that was?

N: I think it was Martin Luther King. But during the meeting he had said, "I'm sitting here and I'm doing all the talking. I want some ideas from you guys. Doesn't anybody have any ideas?" One of them said, "Mr. President, you're talking and we're listening." That's really where Johnson shined more than anywhere else was in a small group. The "Treatment." He never could come across on the mass media the way he could in person. He was not an electronics person. His personal magnetism never showed through, I don't think, on television or any of the mass media. If he had problems, that was one of the reasons. He just couldn't project.

G: Did you get any insight on his attitude toward the press?

N: He really liked the press generally. He wasn't one of these people who feared [the press].

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G: We're talking about LBJ and the press.

N: He never pulled the dog's ears.

G: He didn't?

N: No. No. He used to lift them in a way that it looked like it, but he didn't lift them by their ears. He'd be holding them and they'd be yapping and loving it. The one thing Lyndon Johnson never hurt is an animal. Johnson always felt he had to prove himself in front of the press. He had a great many friends. He was always afraid of being misinterpreted. Of course, he was very sensitive to any criticism. I mean, the thing with his gall bladder operation, he had to prove that he hadn't had a heart attack, that there was a scar there. We're just lucky that it wasn't a hemorrhoid operation. (Laughter)

I frequently worked with the press in the White House. The press generally liked Johnson very much, because he was very open with them. (Interruption)

N: Should I tell you about the bugging of the Oval Office?

G: Sure.

N: Unlike the Nixon White House, Mr. Johnson would not allow any recording devices. In fact he absolutely forbid anything like that. We had them on the telephones, but they had beeps on them, and they were used for the purposes that one would normally use to record. Somebody had information

to give, you would turn on the recorder. They weren't used as listening devices, and they did have the beep tone in it.

But the President was going to have his first meeting with the new Russian ambassador. It was determined by powers other than myself that the meeting should be privately recorded. So I took it upon myself, with the Signal Corps, to have a briefcase built for the President that had a tape recorder built into it. It was a beautiful thing. The President was still unconvinced by the whole thing. One Sunday the Signal Corps brought me the briefcase that they had finished. The handle had an on-off button. Microphones were cleverly secreted in the side of the case. It hummed. The state of the art was not that great. I took it up to the Mansion to demonstrate it for the President. I said, "If you're meeting with the Russian ambassador, you just have this briefcase next to your desk. To turn it on you just turn the handle here." I turned it on. It started humming. Hmmmm. He said, "Oh, now isn't that wonderful? Isn't that clever?" He did one of his mimic routines. "Come on in, Mr. Ambassador. Now don't trip over the steamer trunk that's humming over there in the corner." He said, "Would you get that goddamn thing out of here."

(Laughter)

It was put in a closet and never used.

G: That's a good story.

N: The humming steamer trunk.

(Laughter)

G: Anything else on Lyndon Johnson, the man?

N: There are so many things.

G: He did have a marvelous sense of humor.

N: That he did. That he did. And again, it's a shame that the humor never came across to the public.

G: I gather that a lot of it was hyperbole, the ability to really exaggerate things.

N: Exactly. Like this briefcase is a steamer trunk, that sort of [thing]. But he did. In private groups he would just keep everybody in stitches. It's a shame that that humor never came across to the public. He was too stern in public. That was his one major shortcoming, from a public relations standpoint anyway.

G: Is there anything else that you'd like to add that you haven't touched on here?

N: No. Are there any more questions that you might have?

G: No, but I'd like to reserve the right to come back.

N: That you might do at any time.

G: Well, thank you much.

[End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview I]

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