

INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL CARL L. PHINNEY

Interviewer: Joe B. Frantz

Dallas, Texas, October 11, 1968

F: General, identify yourself briefly for our purposes. Where are you from? What have you done?

P: I was born in Marble Falls, Texas. I attended the public schools in Austin and graduated from high school at Brownwood in 1920. I attended the University of Texas from 1921 to 1928. In 1931 I commenced the practice of law in Dallas, Texas. During that time I served in the 36th Infantry Division of the Texas National Guard, enlisting in the 36th in 1925. I became a Technical Sergeant and in 1927 I was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant and wound up in 1954 with an appointment as the Division Commander with the grade of Major General. At the time I retired from the 36th Infantry Division I was made the Commanding General of the Texas National Guard with the rank of Lieutenant General. During that period of time, of course, I had an opportunity to serve with the 36th Infantry Division overseas. We were mobilized in 1940, went out to Camp Bowie at Brownwood, Texas, and in 1943, we went overseas and served in North Africa; then on September 9, 1943, I made the landing with the 36th Infantry Division on the beaches of Salerno. I served with the Division as the Division Quartermaster and as the assistant Chief of Staff G-4 on the general staff of Major General Fred L. Walker, who was the Division Commander. In October of 1944 I was returned to the States and on December 31, 1945 I was released from active duty.

F: When did you first come to know Mr. Johnson?

P: Marble Falls, Texas is about 25 miles from Johnson City. My mother was born in Spicewood, Texas, which is about 12-14 miles from Austin. President Johnson's father was a very close friend of my father and mother. She was Lily Shugart, and the Shugarts had been living around Shovel Mountain, Spicewood, Blanco, in that area for many, many years; one of the interesting stories that Mr. Sam Johnson, the President's father, told me was an occasion when they caught a horse thief over at Shovel Mountain and took him before my great grandfather, who was then a Justice of the Peace. And Judge Shugart wanted to hang him at that time. They had a hard time convincing him that there had to be an indictment returned by a grand jury and go through the due process of law. But he was ready to mete out the justice of the West right on the spot.

F: Where is Shovel Mountain?

P: Shovel Mountain is, as I recall, about ten miles from Blanco and probably 15 or 20 miles from Johnson City.

F: Was Sam Johnson your parents' representative or were they in a different district?

P: No, at the time Mr. Sam Johnson became a member of the legislature, my first recollection of him was in 1919. I was a page in the House of Representatives to then Speaker Judge Ewing Thomason, who was at that time from Gainesville, Texas. He later became a very famous Congressman and a very distinguished federal judge out at El Paso.

One day I was running down the aisle of the legislative halls in the House of Representatives and Mr. Sam Johnson grabbed me by the arm and nearly jerked me off my feet and asked me was I Charlie Phinney's boy? And I told him I was. He said, "Well, I was sorry to hear about your mother dying last year; your mother and father were close friends of ours. I have a boy I want you to meet some time named Lyndon." I guess about two or three weeks later he brought him up there. At that time I believe I was about 13 years old, and I imagine that President Johnson was about 8 or 9 years old. That was my first meeting with Lyndon Baines Johnson.

F: Did you see Sam Johnson fairly often through the years?

P: Yes, sir, after he had retired from the legislature, he became identified with the law enforcement division of the Railroad Commission in the motor transportation section and I saw him quite frequently up until the time he retired. One of the interesting things about President Johnson's father was that he made a speech one day to the House of Representatives against the Ku Klux Klan. At that time I would say the body was made up of about 65 to 70% people who were favorable to the Klan, and I would say it was really an unpopular time to make this speech. But he had a mind of his own and he never hesitated about speaking on those issues. Following him, another member of the House of Representatives named Wright Patman, who is now a Congressman from the Texarkana district, also made a speech. I would say that Mr. Sam Johnson's attack on the Klan was the entering wedge of the fight that ultimately destroyed them.

F: Was his speaking style anything like his son's or did the son seem to copy any of his father's speech habits?

P: Well, there was some similarity. Mr. Sam Johnson could get very loud and very emphatic in his argument as can President Johnson. I think their style of speaking to some extent is similar.

F: Now, you met this 8-year old boy. Did it make enough impression on you that you remembered it, or did you reconstruct this later?

P: I did not remember it too well until he became identified with Congressman Kleberg. Of course, I was not living in that Congressional district at the time this took place.

F: Then you were in Dallas?

P: Yes, sir. Subsequent to that, when he made the race for Congress down there, I met him on two or three occasions through my brother Bob Phinney, who resides in Austin and who is the Internal Revenue Director for the Southern District of Texas. Bob had been working with Mr. Johnson in the Youth Development Program before he went to Congress with Congressman Kleberg. After that, I would see Congressman Johnson on visits to Washington. In 1948, when he undertook to make his race for the United States Senate, I had a call from Colonel Ernest O. Thompson, who said that he would like for me to handle Mr. Johnson's campaign for the United States in Northeast Texas, taking in the district of Dallas and running up to the Red River on the north and to the east over around Texarkana and down through Longview and in that area.

F: Was Ernest O. Thompson Railroad Commissioner at that time?

P: Yes, sir. Of course, he was my regimental commander when I was first inducted in Brownwood in 1940.

F: You hadn't taken part in any Johnson campaign up until that time?

P: No, sir, I hadn't had an opportunity because I was out of the district and I usually had my hands full with my own Congressman.

F: Your relationship with him then until that time was more or less social?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Mr. Johnson developed a reputation for assisting people in projects outside his own district. Did you ever have any occasion to call on him?

P: Yes, I called on him on several occasions when we needed some help. He knew no boundary as far as his district was concerned. Wherever he felt that the matter was beneficial and had merit, he would assist anyone. Of course, they have a little bit of a code between the Congressmen that one doesn't encroach on the other's territory unless they have knowledge of it, and he was very specific whenever anything like that happened, to get in touch with the other Congressman and ask him if it would be all right if he assisted in this matter.

F: Do you recall any types of assistance that you received?

P: No, I do not specifically. I know I would talk to him on occasions about some legislation that we might have some interest in. But I could not specifically point out what it was.

F: Colonel Thompson got in touch with you to handle the northern area of the campaign against Coke Stevenson?

P: Yes, sir.

F: What did you do?

P: Well, I organized the district and raised the money and handled his campaign up here.

F: Did you more or less follow the lines of the Congressional district, or what determined your district?

P: No, I had districts that made up Mr. Rayburn's district, Congressman Patman's district--I've forgotten who the Congressman was at that time from the Longview-Tyler area.

F: That wasn't Senterfitt?

P: No. I don't believe so. But I had what they called Northeast Texas. As I recall, we had pretty well divided the State into four parts and mine was the Northeast Texas part.

F: Do you recall who had the other three parts?

P: No, sir, I do not.

F: What did you do to make Mr. Johnson something of a name in this area? You had to take a known state-wide name like Stevenson who had been Governor and put up against it a man who was primarily restricted to Central Texas.

P: Well, we got him into and out of this area frequently. Of course, he was the first candidate I know of who used a helicopter. We would book him at various places and I would meet him wherever his helicopter was going to land and would have already arranged through the local campaign managers of these various counties to set up his speaking engagements. It didn't take him long to let everybody know that he was not just a Congressman; that he had the capacity and was then, I think, a

national figure. When he got through speaking, the people understood he knew what he was doing and had the capacity to go on to greater things.

F: Do you know where he got the idea for the use of the helicopter?

P: No, I do not. I know this. We had some trouble at times where he would land, but we normally worked them out pretty well.

F: Did you try to land the helicopter adjacent to where he was going to speak?

P: Yes, sir, that's where we attempted to land it. Even to the point where we landed one time on the grounds of a school where we had the group assembled. It took a little arguing with the police department to let him get in there, but finally we convinced them it was all right. It worked out in good shape.

F: Where did he speak mostly when he would land by helicopter?

P: He'd speak adjacent to the courthouse or he might land near a stadium or he might land near a school. At times we put him in where there was a rodeo crowd and they'd give us permission for him to speak. It was nothing for him to make nine or ten speeches a day. He did an excellent job, an outstanding job, of it.

F: How did your day go when you were working one of these speaking engagements? Can you describe a somewhat typical day?

P: Well, we would of course have to submit to him and to his headquarters where the itinerary was and what our recommendations were as to the places he would speak. I would simply meet him at the first place he was to speak. For example, we might have booked him to speak at Gainesville, Texas. I would meet him at Gainesville and when he started speaking, I would get in my car and try to beat him to the next

place because I knew when he got in that helicopter, he could out-run an automobile. Most of the time we were able to work it out. We would finally wind up on an itinerary normally at a night speaking where he would spend the night and take off the next morning maybe for some other area.

F: Did you spend the night there or would you be busy getting to the first place the next day?

P: Well, I would not spend the night there unless he was going out of the district that I was responsible for. If he was going on out to some other area, I would normally spend the night with him there where his last stop was.

F: Well, let's say that he was going to speak at Gainesville as an opening stop. Would he come up to some central place like Dallas through regular transportation and then take a helicopter to Gainesville? Where would he get hold of his helicopter? He obviously wouldn't fly it 600 miles all over the State.

P: No, normally it would meet him here in Dallas or on occasion, if we only had 35 or 40 miles to drive, we might take him in a car from Dallas and let the helicopter pick him up at his first speaking point. Then from there one he would run the itinerary out until he got through with the night speaking.

F: Did you figure the helicopter attracted crowds?

P: Very definitely.

F: It wasn't just a matter of easy mobility?

P: Of course, a lot of people never had seen a helicopter. I think he really was able to create a very good image by his daring, so to speak, in using a helicopter. As I said, to my knowledge, he was the first one to ever use one.

F: That sort of gave him an image of aggressiveness?

P: Right.

F: There's an old story that he used to lose his hat when he would come in. Was that planned?

P: No, normally he might hand his hat to somebody and we might not know who it was and then we'd have to start looking around for it. Or he'd pitch it off somewhere where we'd have to go look. He lost several. There's no question about that.

F: You think there are a few prize mementos somewhere.

P: I think so.

F: Where were you at the time that the returns were coming in in that close race between him and Governor Stevenson?

P: I was at the Texas Election Bureau headquarters here, and as I recall, he was in Austin at the time the returns were coming in. Of course, they were getting the same returns by radio that we were here. It was very close. If you recall, I think there were 87 votes finally between the two of them. One thing that I was always impressed with was the fact that President Johnson came out on the question, for example, of labor. He made the statement that the matter of management and labor, business and labor, was a two-way street. He did not think either side ought to have the advantage. For some reason or other, former Governor Coke Stevenson never mentioned the Taft-Hartley Act or any of those things; never got into it at all. I think that was one of the

reasons that so many voters were attracted to Mr. Johnson, because he spoke out on issues. He didn't pull any punches about it at all.

F: Do you recall whether labor sought out Governor Stevenson to endorse him, or whether Governor Stevenson sought labor? He was not known as a particular friend of labor, and yet he received their endorsement.

P: I don't recall exactly how it happened, but I know there was a lot of criticism about the way Stevenson did not come out on these issues that might be antagonistic toward organized labor.

F: Do you recall whether Mr. Johnson was surprised when labor endorsed Stevenson?

P: I don't know whether he was surprised or not. I know he was disappointed, because he was hopeful that he could get the endorsement. His record had been such that he was speaking out on legislation of the type of the Taft-Hartley Bill that was sorely needed in the regulation of organized labor. I think the fact that the endorsement went the way it did, did not injure Mr. Johnson too much in the campaign.

F: Did you have any difficulty getting financing in this part of the state?

P: No, sir.

F: On what did you base your pitch to prospective contributors?

P: Well, it wasn't difficult to sell them on his ability. We'd take him around and let him meet business groups and people that I would solicit funds from, but I don't want to leave the impression it was easy. We got the financing where we were able to put the campaign on like we wanted to.

F: Let's leave 1948 for a while and go back to after the second World War. This may be a dry hole, but let's drill on it a moment. The

36th Division and General Mark Clark got at cross-purposes.

P: Yes, sir.

F: That's putting a good face on it. This even found its way into Congress.

P: Yes, sir.

F: Was Mr. Johnson ever in a position to take a stand on this?

P: This investigation was going on prior to the time that Mr. Johnson was elected to the Senate. There was an investigation by the House Military Affairs Committee and then some of us appeared before the Senate committee on it; Senator [Tom] Connally had introduced me and General Miller Ainsworth and one or two others (I've forgotten who they were). At the time that we went before the Military Affairs Committee of the House, Mr. Johnson came in there and offered whatever assistance he could to us in the presentation of our statements. As I recall, Congressman Ewing Thomason was a very high ranking member of that Committee at that time.

F: Did Mr. Johnson's staff give you any help in preparing your statements?

P: Yes, if we needed some information, they would get it for us. We had full cooperation actually from all the Texas delegation in the House and in the Senate.

F: As far as you remember, he didn't make any public statement himself-- he just assisted.

P: No, sir, not that I recall.

The first time I saw President Johnson after I got back from overseas, my brother Bob and I went over on the same ship in the same

stateroom and we returned at the same time. There was a party in Austin where I remember that Congressman Johnson and Mrs. Johnson were present at Bob's house. We had quite a visit at that time, but of course that was the first time I had seen him since 1940.

F: Were you associated in the army with Hardy Hollers?

P: No, sir.

F: So you had no personal interest in that Hardy Hollers-Johnson campaign.

P: No.

F: You weren't forced to take sides. All right, after the 1948 campaign what relationship did you have with Mr. Johnson? You had made a Senator out of him.

P: Well, we continued after he became a Senator to have frequent meetings. When he would come to Dallas, we'd get together; I have a picture here on the wall that was autographed by him that was taken after he had won the general election of 1948. I assisted also with the other lawyers in the litigation of the defense of Senator Johnson when they tried to keep him off the ballot. But after it was all over, when his race would come up again, I would help him in any capacity he wanted me to.

F: In that 1948 contest, the judicial contest, did you have sort of a Texas group of lawyers and some Washington legal assistance, or was it pretty well run in Texas? How did you organize that defense?

P: The people I worked with were Everett Looney and Ed Clark in Austin, and I did not participate with anybody outside of that firm in this litigation because they were the ones, as I recall, that had filed the answers. I think subsequently some other lawyers got into it, but I did what they wanted me to do there.

F: On what legal grounds were the Stevenson forces contesting the election?

P: Oh, as I recall, they were talking about some irregularities in some of the ballot boxes and tried to leave the impression that Mr. Johnson had personally had a hand in it, which of course was the furthestest from the truth. He had had some experience before with votes being changed when he ran against, I think it was Mr. O'Daniel--

F: Yes, sir, in 1941.

P: And it looked like he was going to be elected there for several days until some boxes came in that changed the thing. It was unfortunate that the fight was made on him by the Stevenson forces, but he was a man that you either liked him or you didn't. There was very little middle ground. He fought this thing and of course ultimately prevailed in it. I recall, I believe, that putting his name on the ballot with the State Executive Committee--there was quite a fight there but it was finally worked out without any difficulty.

F: Were you involved in that?

P: No, sir. I had been a delegate to the Convention, but I was not on the Executive Committee.

F: Did you take any part in this 1954 campaign against Dudley Dougherty?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Same job?

P: Same job. I just helped organize the districts up here and of course he came out of this district with a tremendous majority.

F: That was a little more comfortable feeling.

P: That's right.

F: Did you have a downtown Dallas headquarters for the Senator, or was his headquarters run strictly out of Austin?

P: We had a headquarters here and I'm trying to recall where it was. I believe it was at the Baker Hotel. It was at one of the hotels and I think that was where it was.

F: You mean it just stuffed envelopes and answered telephones?

P: That's right and organized the precincts. Of course, we had a publicity section. We had it pretty well organized along the line as well as you could organize any campaign.

F: Did Mr. Johnson visit the headquarters with some frequency, or did he pretty much leave it up to you?

P: Oh, when he'd come in he'd go in and shake hands with the workers and visit a little bit. But as to the work, he left that pretty well to us.

F: Were you active in that pre-convention 1960 boom for Johnson for President?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Tell me about that.

P: Well, there was the same situation here. I was asked to make contacts with people I knew in other states.

F: Who asked you?

P: As I recall, it was Mr. Johnson that asked me to do it. Of course he was busy in Congress, and as I recall, he told me that he had to depend on his friends to get the delegates lined up and would appreciate whatever I could do. I would report back to his headquarters there in Washington whatever I found out.

F: Did you visit other states, or did you do this by telephone?

P: No, this was done by telephone.

F: What sort of response did you receive?

P: Well, I received some very good response and some not so good. I did not go to the Convention because the 36th Division was in summer camp and I couldn't leave. But we picked up some votes for him. I remember we called some of the people out in some of the western states that did deliver their votes for him. It was a little bit late and I was, of course, very disappointed that he did not get the nomination. Then when he was nominated for Vice-President, I was very surprised. I think one little incident that might be of interest was that his secretary called me one day. You'll recall they had a three-weeks' session of Congress between the conventions and the election. The secretary said that the Majority Leader wanted to see me and when was I coming to Washington. I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I'm getting ready to go to the airport now. I'll be in there tonight." "Well, he'll see you tomorrow."

So I went by and went over to see him, and he said that he wanted me to take the chairmanship of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket in this Congressional district. I told him that I didn't know whether I could do it or not because I believed everything he said about Jack Kennedy was true, and I didn't know whether I could do it or not. He laughed and said,

"Now I don't think this is a teasing matter. I want you to do it."

And I said, "Well, of course, I'll be glad to" and I did. In fact, when Kennedy and Johnson came to Dallas jointly, we had arranged for them to speak at the Municipal Auditorium. Mr. Sam Rayburn introduced

Jack Kennedy and I introduced Mr. Johnson to the speaking that day.

I met them over at Fort Worth, and of course I did not take charge of it until they got into

F: They came in a motorcade from Fort Worth.

P: Right. They stopped at Arlington and when they left Arlington, we took them over. I remember coming through Grand Prairie; it was an amazing thing to me how many women wanted to get some souvenir from Mr. Kennedy. They'd say, "Well, let me have a shoestring or a necktie or handkerchief or anything."

I was sitting between Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson as we came through Grand Prairie. We had a stop out at Chance-Vought near Grand Prairie, where there were about 12 to 15,000 people. Some woman kept insisting and crowding the car for Mr. Kennedy to give her a Souvenir, and he reached across me and took Mr. Johnson's handkerchief out of his pocket and handed it to her. Of course, Mr. Johnson was always a little fastidious in his dress and he reached up to fix his handkerchief and said, "Where in the hell is my handkerchief?"

And Kennedy said, "Well, I gave it to that woman back there at Grand Prairie."

F: You came, as I recall, into Dallas and went out to Municipal Auditorium, right?

P: That's right.

F: Did you have a good crowd?

P: Yes, tremendous. It was full. People were standing.

F: You'd had no difficulty getting the crowd out?

P: Not a bit in the world and I would say that there were over 150,000 people on the streets welcoming them as they came through. It was a much larger turnout for Kennedy and Johnson than Nixon got when he came here about a week before that.

F: Did you have any problems with some of the more conservative elements in Dallas? I'm thinking particularly of Dr. Criswell and Carr Collins, who I know were rather bitterly opposed to the Kennedy-Johnson ticket.

P: We didn't have too much trouble. We had a good organization here. Judge Hughes was co-chairman with me (Sarah T. Hughes, who is now a federal judge), and Mr. Barefoot Sanders was the campaign manager. So the three of us had a pretty good organization, and we had a tremendous number of volunteers. I attribute one of the factors that helped us carry Texas for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket was Congressman [Bruce] Alger. We had arranged a speaking engagement for Senator Johnson at the Adolphus Hotel. When we brought him again I met him at Fort Worth and I took him over then and brought him back. As we were coming through Grand Prairie and got into the city limits of Dallas, one of the policemen rode up by the side of me and said, "General Phinney, they're having a little disturbance at the Baker Hotel and we want to take you around and put you out on Akard Street entrance instead of the Commerce Street entrance."

I said, "Well, I don't like to vary this schedule and I know Senator Johnson wouldn't want it done." And he said,

"Well, I think it's best." And I said,

"Well, go ahead."

So we got out and drove up on the Akard Street entrance of the hotel, and I didn't realize the extent of the hatred that had been built up until one of the women grabbed Mrs. Johnson's gloves out of her hands and threw them in the gutter. Then there was Alger, Congressman Alger, with this ugly sign about Senator Johnson. We got into the Baker Hotel lobby, and they had an elevator waiting to take us up to the suite where he and Mrs. Johnson could freshen up before we took them over to the luncheon at the Adolphus. They were jeering him and booing him. They had a lot of young women in Dallas that were there, and I told several of them who were friends of ours and friends of my daughter that they'd better go on home--that this was very unbecoming of them to mistreat a public official like this. But it was preorganized. Alger had put all those signs and everything in the Baker Hotel the night before. I had a lot of trouble with the then Senator Johnson; he wanted to go out and make them a speech. I finally got him in the elevator with Mrs. Johnson and we took him on up. While I was there I got a call that they thought I ought to surreptitiously take him out through the automobile entrance and get him in a car and take him around and secretly get him into the Adolphus Hotel. I said,

"Well, I'm not even going to suggest that because I know the Senator well enough to know that he's not afraid of anything, and we'll come down and walk just like we planned to."

Of course, a tremendous crowd had gathered on Commerce Street between the two hotels. We really didn't encounter too much trouble until we got into the lobby of the Adolphus and I was trying to get them

moving through this crowd as much as I could. Senator Johnson asked me not to push him. He said, in fact, "I want you to get away from me." He said, as I recall, "If the time has come when I can't walk through the lobby of a hotel in Dallas with my lady without a police escort, I want to know it."

When he told me to get away from him, I forgot to add that he also asked me to ask the police to leave, which I did, and they did. And then he made that statement. We finally got him into the dining room of the Adolphus, where I would say there were about 2,800 people. He made a tremendous speech; we then took him out to Oak Cliff Shopping Center and he made a speech out there that afternoon. At that speaking there was not one voice of dissent against him.

Mrs. Phinney and I had arranged to have Mrs. Johnson and the Senator and part of his staff traveling with him to dinner with us that night before they went on to Houston. We were watching the TV and after we got through dinner, I took them on out to the airport and they went on to Houston where he addressed another rally that night. I feel like it was that one thing--one of the Senators from Kentucky called him--it was a Republican, I don't know whether it was [John Sherman] Cooper or who it was--while we were eating dinner and had heard about this thing. He apologized that a Republican member of the House would stoop to such things as Alger had done. The newspaper publicity from all over the United States and the TV coverage, I think, were responsible for Texas going for them. I think if any one thing turned it, it was that incident.

F: Does evidence indicate that Congressman Alger actually organized this?

P: No question about it. We made an investigation of it for our own benefit and of course as a result of that, we were able to get us another Congressman.

F: Did Dallas' long-time family friendships break up somewhat over this sort of activity? Or did they manage to put politics on one side?

P: There might have been a little temporary break on occasion, but I don't think it amounted to too much. I don't think it was any cleavage of a permanent nature.

F: Did you try to answer any of the specific arguments that people like Dr. Criswell proposed against having a Catholic in the White House?

P: Well, at the time I told you I had my conference with the Majority Leader when he asked me to take over the chairmanship of this Congressional district, he told me, "I know you're very active in the Masonic Lodge and we're planning on organizing a group of members of the Masonic Lodge as well as pastors throughout the State to meet with Senator Kennedy in Houston and let him subject himself to whatever answers there are." So that thing came off exactly as he had said.

F: Who picked the pastors?

P: I don't know. It was all done through the Houston organization. I don't think anybody picked them particularly. I think they just invited a group of them that would conform to the time period they had for the broadcast. It wasn't a hand-picked group. You could tell that from the questions that were asked. But it pretty well laid to rest the controversy after that; it was a very serious one.

F: Did either President Kennedy or Vice-President Johnson consult with you before Sarah Hughes was offered a federal judgeship?

P: Yes.

F: Who contacted you?

P: Of course, the first people who contacted me were the FBI. Then I was asked by the White House, I've forgotten which secretary it was. Senator Johnson knew how much I admired Judge Hughes, and I had told him from time to time what a great job she was doing. When he told me about this proposed appointment, I said, 'Well, there's no question but what she'll make an outstanding federal judge. We members of the Bar Association in Dallas, or the member of the bar that make up the Association--I'd say that if you asked 90% of them, they'd tell you that while she was on the district bench here in Dallas, they would just as soon or rather try cases before her as any other judge.'

F: Was that because she knew her law or ran a taut court or what?

P: Both. We tried a lot of cases before her, and have tried several since she has been on the federal bench. She's a very distinguished jurist.

F: Where were you in November, 1963, when all the tragedy broke loose?

P: I was out at the Trade Mart.

F: Can you describe briefly your reactions that day?

P: Well, my military aide still helps me here in Dallas--Colonel Lewis Stephens--we had a table that had been assigned to us that was just above where the speakers table was to be. Of course, the Mayor was going to meet them and everybody was waiting. Then one of the newspapermen saw Colonel Stephens and said to him they wanted me around

in the newsroom, that there was a report that the President had been shot. I ran around there right quick and they let me listen in on some kind of a broadcast that one of the newspapermen were making down where the shooting had occurred. So I went back and told the group at my table that someone had shot the President. We did not know at that time that Governor Connally had been wounded; we learned that about two minutes later. Every woman at the table broke down and cried.

We walked out, after Mayor [Erik] Jonsson had made the announcement that the President had been shot and that Governor Connally had been shot, to the car and by the time that we got to the automobile the news was on the radio that the President was dead. It was a terrific shock. I belong to the Dallas Country Club and it's noted for its conservative members. I often kid them out there that Pat, the colored locker boy, and I are probably the only two Democrats out there. But the thing that amazed me was, I went on out after--I had them close the office and I went on out to the country club and the reaction among all of them was what a great tragedy had happened, and they were all coming around expressing their sorrow to me because of my identity with the candidates for so long. It was a tragedy. Dallas got a lot of unfavorable publicity and comments from the eastern press about it, but it was one of those things. The people in Dallas were no more responsible for President Kennedy's death than Los Angeles was responsible for his brother's death.

I got on the plane the next morning and went to Washington and there was a newspaper columnist on the plane. I did not know him and

did not know he was on the plane, and one of the stewardesses as we got off, said that he was on the plane and wanted me to ride into town with him; that he wanted to interview me about the assassination and about my feelings about President Johnson. He wrote a very wonderful story as a result of this that was printed throughout the United States. He was not at all critical about Dallas; he had been here when the shooting occurred and he was interested in getting my feelings about what would happen with President Johnson in there and what kind of a President he would make, etc. I then attended part of the services. By that, I mean I was on the street when the services were concluded and saw the casket go by. I had been up to the House of Representatives; Congressman George Mahon and Congressman Earle Cabell took me into the rotunda of the Capitol with them as they went by to pay their respects. Subsequent to that of course they had the funeral, and I did not go on out to the cemetery because of the tremendous crowd.

F: Did you contact Mr. Johnson at all on this trip?

P: I saw him over in the Senate Office Building and just offered my services for whatever help I could be. Of course, he was in such an agitated state over this tragedy and many of his friends, particularly from Texas, had done the same thing. And they were very helpful to him during those hours. I did not, outside of that brief visit-- I was invited and sat with Mrs. Johnson when he made his first State of the Union message. He had invited me to occupy one of the seats in the box with her, which I did.

F: Did you take an active part in the 1964 campaign?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Same position?

P: No, in 1963 I took on the job as a coordinator of the President's Club.

In 1964 I was handling that for pretty near the same territory that I had in 1948. Then they asked me to make some trips to other parts of the United States, which I did, in connection with his campaign.

F: What did you do?

P: Oh, I was primarily raising money.

F: Seeing individuals?

P: Right.

F: And groups? Or just individuals?

P: No, just individuals.

F: Were these people that you knew or were they people that were suggested to you?

P: For example, if I knew so-and-so, they would suggest that I go see him and let him arrange for them to take me around and let me visit some people that might be interested in joining the Presidents Club. That was the way we handled it.

F: How were you received?

P: Very cordially.

F: Successfully?

P: Yes.

F: No great problems then?

P: No, sir.

F: Have you ever been tendered a position by Mr. Johnson in the government?

P: No, sir.

F: Haven't wanted one?

P: No, sir. I have not wanted one. I've enjoyed a very rich relationship with President Johnson. I would not seek any type of appointment at all. I'm sure that he could find people that would suit him better, or do a better job, but I think he knows me well enough to know that if he ever needed me for anything, that I'd be glad to do it. But the matter of giving up my law practice and going to Washington never did appeal to me.

F: You now have a half-century association with him, don't you?

P: Yes, sir, I sure do.

F: Have you had any political contact with him since 1964, any activity at all other than just the sort of routine crossing of paths?

P: Well, we on occasions would have these Presidents Club dinners.

F: Is that organized formally? How is that set up?

P: There's nothing too formal about it. Of course, they try to pick the people, so to speak, but it's merely a matter of going to see them and if they're interested in becoming a member of the Presidents Club, we go ahead and take them in.

F: What sort of contact do you keep with the people in the Club?

P: Up until the time he announced that he was not going to run again-- we kept frequent contacts. We've had--

F: Do you have sort of a newsletter?

P: That's normally done out of the National Democratic Committee. For example, we had Vice-President Humphrey down here in 1965; it was

the first time he had been in Dallas in a long time, and I think it was the first time that he had had an opportunity to meet with the group that was confined. But you'll remember we had this dinner in Austin for him and we did a little work on that and did a lot of work on the one in Houston. I have not seen the President in that time. He's busy and I have had several fine visits with him; most of the time it was purely a social proposition.

F: When you have a Presidents Club dinner, do you have some sort of a geographical invitation on it? For instance, if you held one here in Dallas and I was in Missouri and wanted to come, there would be no objection?

P: No, but primarily the ones we held here, and I think this pattern is true all over the United States, we have a Southwest region made up of New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana--of course, others can come if they're members of the Presidents Club in their district, and it would be perfectly all right.

F: Does your personal coordination extend outside the whole district; what are the limits?

P: We set up, as far as the State of Texas was concerned, a committee of six and I was one of them. We pretty well organized the entire State on the same area; the State was divided into six districts and the steering committee was comprised of the ones that had charge of the various districts.

F: Do you know who the other five were?

P: Well, Mr. Ralph McCullough was the overall chairman from Houston; I just don't remember.

- F: That's not important. Did this idea of the Presidents Club start in this part of the country, or do you know how it began?
- P: I understand that it was started through Mr. Richard Maguire, who had been very active in the Kennedy race in 1960. In fact, we kid him as being one of the Irish Mafia.
- F: Who is Richard Maguire?
- P: Well, he was the secretary or really was the manager, I guess you would say, I think he carried the title of treasurer of the Democratic National Committee. He's now very active for Mr. Humphrey. I think he actually is the one who originated the idea.
- F: Do you get people in the Presidents Club that aren't politically concerned but just want to sort of be in the Club. In other words, do you tap money that you wouldn't get otherwise?
- P: Yes, we get some who have never identified themselves before. Of course, we get some Republicans, too.
- F: They just want to be there?
- P: They want to go to these functions like they had in Houston and Austin; of course, most of them are personal friends of the President, but they carry a different party affiliation.
- F: Would you accept someone on an installment plan basis?
- P: Yes, sir. Sure would.
- F: Do you think this idea is going to carry on or is this going to end with
- P: I don't know. I haven't had any indication about it at all. I just don't know what the future is. I would imagine that it will be carried on.

F: Did you have any advance notice that the President wasn't going to run again?

P: No, sir.

F: Where were you when this happened?

P: I was at home listening to his speech on television.

F: You were as shocked then as I was?

P: I nearly fell out of my chair.

[In 1960 General Phinney was invited to Washington, where Senator Johnson]

P: asked me to be the chairman up here. His secretary said, "You can't stay but five minutes," and I said,

"Young lady, I didn't ask for this appointment. He's the one that phoned me."

And I stayed in there an hour. He hadn't had any lunch and he took that occasion to talk to me about a lot of other things. He even went back reminiscing about something that had happened in World War I that his daddy had been telling him about; about some families back there in Johnson City. But when I walked out of that room if looks could have killed anybody, I'd have been a dead duck, because that secretary really gave me--

F: You had ruined her schedule.

P: Yes, sir.

F: When was this, now?

P: That was in 1960. I don't know why they had this session of Congress, but they came back up there, I guess that was some time in the early part of October or maybe the latter part of September. It was after the Convention was over; maybe it was September. But they started organizing right fast.

F: As a general officer, [what is] your opinion of Mr. Johnson's grasp of military affairs, military tactics, and so on?

P: Well, of course, he has been really a great leader in a lot of these things such as space; he has a grasp of things. Actually when he went into the Navy, he had had a lot of experience and he knew what the situation was. I don't remember very many who were able to do as much. In the little time he was in the Navy on active duty, he apparently did a tremendous job. He got decorated with the Silver Star, which is the third highest decoration the Navy can give. I have been on committees up in the Pentagon in the Department of the Army and the Department of Defense while I was active in the National Guard, and he would always be very helpful to the reserve components. He knew what the problems were, and we would always get a good hearing with him. He had a lot of ability on that thing; I'd say that he was one of the outstanding leaders and had a lot of vision about it. Of course, I think if it hadn't been for him, we might have been in worse shape on this space program. He was the one responsible for that thing, and there's no question about that at all.

F: When Secretary of Defense McNamara gave the order to cut back on reserves, did you contact Mr. Johnson?

P: Yes, sir.

F: Personally or--?

P: Personally. I contacted him and I also contacted Mr. McNamara.

F: Did you know Mr. McNamara?

P: I had met him. I was Vice-President of the National Guard Association of the United States at that time, and I made an appointment with him.

He said he couldn't see me until 6:30 that evening of whatever date it was. I got out there about 6:00 and I sat down and his secretary said, "Well, I'll tell him you're here." And she went in there and told him; he kept me waiting out there 30 minutes while he was reading his mail--until 6:30--and I went in to see him. He said, "Well, I know what your problem is and you've got a lot of friends--joint chiefs of staff and the Secretary of the Army." And I said, "Well, would you like for me to leave a little memorandum or send you a little information on this thing?"

And he said, "No, I know everything about it."

That ended the conference.

F: What did you say to the President?

P: Oh, I just pointed out to him what I thought was the danger of the thing, and he said, "Well, I presume that you're continuing your activities with the committees in the Congress on this thing"

And I said, "Yes, sir I really am."

"Well," he said, "of course some of these things we have to do and I don't know what the final outcome is, but I appreciate your coming by."

F: When a man is named a General Officer, he has to be confirmed by the Senate?

P: Yes, sir.

F: What is that--the Senate Armed Services Committee?

P: Right.

F: Was there any problem at all in your confirmation?

P: Not a bit. In fact, the first knowledge I had that I had been confirmed

was a telegram from Senator Johnson.

F: Do you need any sort of endorsement from your state's Senators or something like that?

P: No, sir, it's restricted by a military board. And after you go before a military board and they have certified your qualifications, it is then recommended by the Secretary of the Army, for example, to the White House for the appointment.

F: Suppose Senator Johnson had wanted to fight your confirmation: would a Senator's antagonism play any role in confirmation?

P: Well, I imagine it would. It has in some of these other appointments, but I think it would have to be a very unusual case before a Senator would do that.

F: In general, it's strictly free of politics?

P: Right.

F: Thank you, again.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By General Carl Phinney

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, General Carl Phinney, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed

Carl L. Phinney

Date

Feb. 18 1970

Accepted

Harry J. Wadsworth - Jr
Archivist of the United States

Date

September 13, 1974