INTERVIEWEE: W. DeVier Pierson

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy McSweeny

DATE: March 20, 1969, Tape II

Mc: This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. W. DeVier Pierson. We are in his offices. Today is Thursday, March 20, 1969, and it's approximately 4:00 in the afternoon.

Mr. Pierson, we were discussing yesterday in the interview the Trans-Pacific air routes. We ended the interview just about on that note, and I wanted to ask you if there were any further activities and amplifications?

P: I think it was a particularly interesting case, perhaps because it's lapped over into this Administration and has been the subject of a good deal of press comment.

As you know, President Johnson has always been very sensitive to press criticism, and often more sensitive than many of us thought he should have been. But in this case, he's really taken a pretty bum rap, so I think he has cause for some legitimate complaint.

The Trans-Pacific Route case is the largest international route case that has come before a president since World War II. So it's a very important economic decision. There are literally hundreds of millions of dollars for the airlines riding on it over a period of years. He was quite conscious of this, and he ordered the CAB to look at the case in 1966. President Eisenhower had aborted the case in the last week of his Administration and sent it back to the CAB so that the route structure in the Pacific was very much the same as it was at the end of World War II. President Johnson thought the case ought to be decided. He asked the Board to expedite the proceedings, and they did.

The Examiner made his findings this past Spring, or perhaps it was June. Then the Board took up the Examiner's findings and sent the case to the White House in November.

CAB international route cases are confidential until the President has acted on them, so no one was certain what was in the case, although of course the rumor mill ground out bits and pieces on it. He had the choice then of either deferring the case to the next Administration, to the Nixon Administration, or going ahead and taking action. It was his view that he ought to act on it, since he'd ordered the case. In effect, it had been a baby of his administration. It was ready to go.

So, he asked me to process it in the normal manner, which meant sending it to the Budget Bureau, which in turn sent it to all the Departments and Agencies involved. He set down a number of guidelines. First, that he would not talk to any of the carriers or their representatives, knowing the sensitivity of doing that; second, that he would not talk to any Congressman about the case; third, that he would not attempt to second-guess the CAB on any matter involving selection of carriers, whether one carrier or another should serve it. This was critical because the Examiner had found for Eastern on a number of the important routes--the routes to the South Pacific, while the Board had found for Continental. Continental had been a strong supporter of the President. Of course, the mills were grinding that there was some hanky-panky on this. The fact of the matter is he didn't know who they had decided for until the Board decision reached the White House and he was advised what their decision was.

So we looked at the case in that context and every department in the government recommended to him that he approve the case with one exception, and that was the elimination of a third carrier to Japan.

It happened that the third carrier that the CAB had chosen was American Airlines, the lines that I guess had been more friendly to President Johnson over the years than any other line. So he took them out of the case. He eliminated the international route to Japan that had been proposed for them. I thought at the time, "Well if there's any act that will ever make it clear that he had thrown politics aside in deciding this case it would be that action."

Well, lo and behold, in the closing days of the Administration there were a flurry of press comments listing all of the people from the various airlines who had had some connection with President Johnson. I must say in my naiveté I thought, "Well, this is just a little flak you have to go through." But he told me the Sunday night before he left office when the bulldog edition of the Washington Post came out with a particularly gory story in it, he said, "Now, I'll tell you what's going to happen. Those are planted stories, and they're planted for the purpose of getting President Nixon to intervene in this case, you wait and see--he'll intervene." Sure enough, that Friday, the CAB got a letter from President Nixon intervening in the case, and as we tape this, he still has the case under consideration. We don't know what will happen.

So I speak with some feeling on this because on this very important economic matter he should have received very good marks. I think he'll end up with good marks, but in the meantime we've all taken a little battering.

Mc: Mr. Pierson, another area connected with trade is the FTC. Did you have any dealings with that?

P: No. We didn't do much with the FTC--except in the context of the President's consumer program. Some of the areas of consumer interest

had an FTC fall-out, but this was really work that Joe Califano and Larry Levinson did. I had no contact in those areas. I probably know less members of the FTC than any other commission.

Mc: Did you have any dealings with the Labor Department and Willard Wirtz?

P: Yes, yes, not on the labor programs, as such but labor as it involved other areas--labor as it involved trade, labor as it involved communications and transportation. So I did have some working relationship with Secretary Wirtz.

Mc: There are great stories as to the rather strained relations between Mr. Wirtz and Mr. Johnson. Can you describe anything that can give any light on that?

P: Yes, I think the relationship was strained between them, and I don't believe they ever had a very close relationship. They certainly didn't the two years that I was there. Secretary Wirtz, at every meeting I saw, was either very eloquent and perhaps a trifle wordy, or he was very exercised--or both. I didn't ever see much rapport between the two of them. The rumors of strain were accurate. I think the President had a healthy respect for Secretary Wirtz's instincts and background in the labor field, although my guess would be that if he was asked to choose the best subject matter man betweeen Bill Wirtz and Jim Reynolds, it would have been Jim Reynolds.

Mc: Do you know what this had stemmed from, or was it just personality?

P: I think it was a number of things. I think that he didn't ever feel that Secretary Wirtz was a Johnson man, that as far as Wirtz was concerned Lyndon Johnson was an accidental President--although I must say that the Secretary paid the President great accolades from time to time. But still I don't think there was ever warmth there. Then Secretary Wirtz made some statements on Viet Nam at the time of the convention

and that if he had been a delegate, he would have supported the peace plank. I don't think that sat well with the President. I think he felt more than anything else that it was a little gratuitous for the Secretary of Labor, who actually wasn't making very much Viet Nam policy.

Then there was this hassle over the reorganization within the Labor Department. That was a very bloody battle, and I wasn't present for the bloodiest fights. I just heard some rather vivid comments by the President as to the inability to get his instructions across.

Mc: Did you have any activities surrounding the passage of the surcharge?

P: Income tax surcharge? Everybody had a little piece of that because it went on and on and on. But as far as the meetings on what percentage, when to send it up--no. I think the President asked me once, if I were he would I send it up, and would I send it up for ten percent or six percent as he had indicated in the State of the Union. And I think he probably asked everybody he ever came in contact with that question at one time or another.

Mc: In your dealings with Commerce, did you work on the balance of payment issues?

P: Yes, to some extent. And here again it was primarily a leading into it because of my responsibility in the trade area. Obviously, balance of trade is a major factor in balance of payments. We were also very concerned that we wouldn't take restrictive balance of payments measures--border taxes, import surcharges and so forth--that would undo and would start unraveling the results of the Kennedy Round. There were two schools of thought within the Administration--the free-trader school, and I'd say that was the State Department and Bill Roth, and I was certainly of that school, and then Secretary Fowler, who was very

concerned about taking short term action, more action than I think the rest of us would like to take. And the President's first of January balance of payments message was the product of a very divided government. There never was unanimity in the government as to whether we had actually accomplished very much by that. By that I think the returns are still out on it.

Mc: Did you have some specific activities on this, either in preparing the message or reaching decisions?

P: No, I did not prepare the message. I made some recommendations on it before it was prepared and sat in on, I guess, most of the meetings after it had been issued and when we were deciding how it should be implemented with respect to any proposals to border taxes or tourist taxes and so forth.

Mc: Did you have any work on the travel tax?

P: Not very much except to oppose it.

Mc: Did you work on the formation of the Department of Transportation?

P: In a strange way I did. It was all before I came to the White House. When I was still on the Hill, Senator Monroney was a very key man on the Department of Transportation and a real thorn in the side of the Administration because he was quite afraid of what the Department would do to the FAA. Alan Boyd and Joe Califano were both lobbying very hard for the Administration bill, and Mike was quite reluctant initially to go along. Finally he began seeking compromise positions that would provide for a redelegation of authority to the FAA Administrator so that the Secretary couldn't over-ride him. I drew up some of the language that became the Monroney position that eventually went into the bill, and I think the President would probably scalp me if he knew that because they were unhappy with it. Looking back on it,

I don't think it was very good language. I think you ought to give your Cabinet officer more responsibility than the Secretary of Transportation has under that bill, but the language was the Monroney view.

Then when the act had been passed it was close to Christmas time in 1966, I guess, and I went to see Charlie Schultze, whom I had met in the Congressional hearings, and told him I would like to be on the task force, working on the organization of the Department of Transportation--frankly just because it just was an interesting thing to do and I had time on my hands with Congress being out of session. And with some reluctance, I think, because he was afraid I guess that the Congress would get mad at him if he didn't, well, he did let me go on it although I was working for Congress at the time. And so I worked on the organization of the public affairs part that included congressional liaison, industry relations and the like, that John Sweeny eventually headed. I headed a task force, or a subtask force within the group, and did work on the organization for that reason.

I didn't have a lot of work with the Department on their nitty-gritty during my White House service except in the area of international air route cases where the President did look to Alan Boyd as one of his principal advisors. I spent a lot of time with Alan on the trans-Pacific Case, for example, and I have immense respect for Alan Boyd as one of the best merit appointments ever made to the Cabinet because here was someone who had helped the department be created. Much of it was really his baby and he thought the problem through from scratch. He had been on a regulatory body, he had been on a state regulatory body, and then he had been Undersecretary of Commerce for transportation. We were all scared to death the President wasn't going to appoint him because he was such an obvious selection.

Mc: Right. Back in the Commerce area--I'm kind of bouncing around here going through my notes--did you have any activities surrounding Mr. Johnson's relations with the Business Council or big business men?

P: No, No, I didn't. I did work on some of the problems relating to proposals made to the Commerce Department by the petrochemical industry. I had some relations with both Sandy Trowbridge and C. R. Smith out of that. But as far as Business Council activities were concerned, I didn't.

Mc: What was your assessment of the replacement of Trowbridge by Smith?

P: It was quite a change. They were entirely different people. Sandy, you know, came into the job by a rather remarkable set of circumstances. You know he was an assistant secretary and then the President proposed the merger of the two departments and he didn't want to bring in a name person. At this time the Secretary and the Undersecretary's jobs were vacant, so they dipped clear down to Sandy to be Acting. Then he did such a good job that when it was clear that the departments weren't going to be merged, the President made him Secretary in his own right. So he was in a sense an accident, but I thought a very capable person, who gave good leadership to that department as best you can. It's a difficult department to lead.

C. R. Smith was, you know, a savvy, crusty, operator, and I have formed a good deal of affection for him over a period of time. You know, he was profane, rough, but with a very, very sound grasp of issues. He could cut through a lot of the minutiae to get to the heart of a problem. He'd been President of a major company, and he understood management, so he was all right. I found him very refreshing. And you could see why he and the President would get along so well, because they were both tough, blunt people. So Sandy and C. R. were just as different as night and day, and I liked them both.

Mc: How were their relations with the President, and vice versa?

P: Sandy was regarded as a very bright young man, and the President was fond of him and liked him enough that he made him a member of his Cabinet. I think he always regarded him as a bright, young man. They didn't have a close, personal friendship. He respected him, and their relationship was in all respects good. The President and C. R. Smith were and are close personal friends. He was one who would have many dinners with him or join him at Camp David on the weekends. It was a difference between--well, the age difference itself created a very different personal relationship.

Mc: Was there any question in your mind regarding Trowbridge's resignation and Mr. Smith's appointment--I believe it was because of health?

P: There was no doubt--you know, Sandy had a serious heart attack, and we were all very concerned about him. It was a sad thing because it cut short his opportunity at a very tender age to be a member of the Cabinet. But there was never any question that the health was an assigned reason--it was the real reason for his resignation. C. R. Smith took us all by surprise--or took me by surprise. I had no idea the President was going to appoint him. That's the last person I would have thought of.

Mc: Another thing in the trade areas, there's been some minor bureaucratic fighting regarding the establishment of--let's see if I've got this straight here--the national banks and Mr. Saxon versus FDIC. Did you get involved in that?

P: No, that wouldn't be in the trade area. That would be in the area of financial institutions, but I was not involved in that and don't know who was. Most of that was over by the time I came.

Mc: In your work as liaison with regulatory agencies, was this sort of divided up among the staff members?

P: Yes. Ernie Goldstein was--I'm not sure what he was doing with them. It was sort of a regular check-in on the action of the regulatory agencies. My work was not with the agency but was with what they were doing. I was involved in aviation problems and that involved the CAB, and in communications problems and that involved the FCC, and so around the way natural resources problems might involve the FPC. I wasn't checking on the agency, but rather their part in the subject matter over which they and perhaps departments within the Executive Branch had jurisdiction. So I may not have been clear as to my role on that.

Mc: Did you all sort of dove-tail your activities, or was there over-lapping in some cases?

P: Oh, there's always over-lapping because you can't cut the government into neat pieces. You could divide it into departments or you could divide it into functions, and the functions would cut across several departments. Someone might have a responsibility for an agency, someone might have a responsibility for a function. And by the nature of the beast you'd have an overlap. Look at the budget every year. They have both an agency breakdown and a functional breakdown. So it was with us.

Mc: Do you recall in the last days of the Administration some of the furor over relations with Cabinet officers and their final invitations to, I think, luncheon parties for Mr. Johnson--

P: You mean the luncheon party at Clark Clifford's?

Mc: Yes.

P: Yes, I think I told you about my part with the very unfortunate problems with Secretary Udall. I wasn't involved with Bill Wirtz in whatever their last fracas was--or with Wilbur Cohen.

Wilbur, you know, you couldn't keep him down if there were five

Presidents of the United States. The President would say, "I want to make it clear that we don't want to spring any projects out of the air that we will saddle the next Administration with unfairly." Wilbur could smile and could smile and say "Yes, Mr. President," and go back to the Department and issue five more press releases on new projects--and I think the President was fairly cheerful about it. Wilbur really got his licks in and was one of the most effective people who ever came to the government. I don't know what final arguments they had, if any. My guess is there's great mutual affection between the two of them right now. But I think he was included as one that wasn't on the Clifford luncheon list, as I remember? He was at the airport. I saw him at the airport.

And Ramsey Clark was--because Ramsey sued IBM at the last minute and did something else. I've forgotten what it was, but I don't think that the President and Ramsey ever had words over it. I think the President felt in an awkward position on all anti-trust matters. He was not a lawyer and yet he had the feeling that the Attorney General should discuss important matters with him before he did them. I think there was some question as to whether he did in fact give any advance warning as to this very late-in-the-game anti-trust action that he was going to take. But I wouldn't rate that as a colossal problem. I believe their relationships are good right now. There were differences of approach to social problems between the President and Ramsey that always continued.

Mc: Mr. Pierson, how would you define your own political philosophy? I know this involves somewhat a use of certain phrases that are limiting.

P: I'm a liberal Democrat. I have strong views on the wisdom of the progress we've made in areas such as civil rights. I'm not a bleeding

heart liberal in the sense that I'm most fearful that the liberal hour has been tarnished by willingness on the part of too many people who hold liberal views to accept clearly irrational acts as a necessary consequence of liberal action. I think that's happening on the college campuses right now; I think it's happened with some of the black leadership where responsible leadership becomes extreme because it will be read out of movement as being too white, too Uncle Tom. I think Martin Luther King had that problem the day that he was killed. So we have excesses in the social areas.

I think I'm a moderate in the economic areas. I don't have a gut-feeling that all business men are bad. I believe the current emphasis on consumer interest is healthy but can be excessive because it can lead to unreasonable control or regulation over business. So I think we need to strike a balance there.

Mc: Did Mr. Johnson attempt to balance staff work by his awareness of what various people's political philosophies were?

P: He may have but I don't think so. I think he came to respect people's views in particular areas. I'm talking about on the White House staff itself, because what I think he did try to get balance in most areas where there was a natural constituency for and against a proposition, or shaded one way or another. And by bringing those departments together on an issue, you've got a blend of differing viewpoints.

As afar as viewpoints within the White House staff, no, I don't think that's so. I think he began to look to one or more people in a given area, felt that they would fairly state the pros and cons of an issue, and then add their own recommendation. Very frankly, I think the stating of the pros and cons is far and away the most important staff function rather than the final recommendation. He always wanted

you to make a recommendation; sometimes he followed you. But it was just telling him what the range of options were that I thought was important, and I didn't see any great balancing act in doing that. I'd say his staff on the whole, that worked on substantive matters, was a pretty liberal staff. And since these were the people putting opinions together there wasn't any resident conservative on matters of substance.

Mc: In presenting both pros and cons of a situation or an issue this would in turn perhaps lead to some convictions. I mean if you felt strongly enough about the side you were on would this create staff friction or rivalry in order to get your view in there?

P: Yes.

Mc: Were there any particular occasions of this?

P: Well rivalry in the sense of--I think rivalry for access to get the views expressed. Let's see. I can't think of any instance where he didn't have a chance to hear a lot of views on almost anything coming up. What have you heard? Maybe you can lead me?

Mc: I won't do that. Were there ever any occasions when you were surprised to find that other people had the same assignment as you did to explore something or look into.

P: No, it never surprised me. It was, you know, I think part of the Roosevelt influence on President Johnson. This was the game that President Roosevelt would play. From what I read he did it more than President Johnson did. We would have periodic staff meetings where the President would go around the table and say, "Now, you know I'm looking to you for this, and you for this, and you for this." It all sounded very neat so no one would be in anyone else's hair. Of course, that wasn't the way it worked. So there were rivalries to some extent,

although I have the feeling that a lot of that had shaken out by the time of my limited service.

When I was there, you really had--well, let's see. You had the legislative area and the putting together of the legislative program. This was clearly Joe Califano's responsibility. You had Congressional relations and, while Larry O'Brien kept a hand in, Barefoot Sanders and Mike Manatos really carried it. And Barefoot was the man the President looked to the most of the two. If anyone replaced Larry it was Barefoot. Then you had sort of a general hodgepodge of responsibilities over particular departments or subject areas. For example, Doug Cater in HEW, and then I picked up some, Harry McPherson had some, and then they sort of diminished as the speech chores became tougher and tougher. With the exception of Civil Rights, where Harry always kept a hand in, particularly after Cliff Alexander left.

But the way it worked usually was that in the day-to-day problems of the department, or reviewing departmental decisions, or anticipating departmental problems, each of us went our own way. Then if it involved the legislative programs, well then we would be working with Joe [Califano] in the preparation of the message and the legislative program. Then of course Joe had major responsibilities in other areas other than legislation. But in legislative areas we were generally working together.

Mc: Did you do much work on the Hill as far as Congressional relations.

P: I did some, not too much, no. When I first came to the White House I tried to pick up some of the load and saw a number of Congressmen just on whatever was coming up. But eventually it got to the place where I really wasn't able to spend time on it except when it was in connection with something that I was really interested in. Or I was seeing them

because of knowledge on a particular subject rather than just seeing them to be seeing them.

Mc: Which ones were these?

P: Which?

Mc: Ones did you particularly work on with members of the House or Senate?

P: Bills in the economic area, the Trade Bill, the Farm Bill, the Natural Resources and Conservation Bills, the special situations like the Secret Service protection legislation where I talked to all the Congressmen involved--but that was an emergency--and then in areas of such importance that we were all involved in them, the surtax where we spent countless hours seeing and re-seeing Congressmen till we were blue in the face.

Mc: Did you ever find, or sort of mark some down, as particular adversaries?

P: There were obvious adversaries--usually, but not always, Republican. I didn't have particular adversaries because I was generally going to see someone that I had some past background with. I'd sometimes go see some of the Oklahoma congressman because I knew them--Ed Edmondson and Tom Steed and Carl Albert and so forth. I never could get to first base with my own Congressman John Jarman. He was absolutely hopeless--and a good friend, but never gave us a vote on anything. Then I saw a number of the mid-Western Congressmen, some of the younger ones. Most of them were friendly on most issues, the Indiana group--a bright, bright group, John Brademas, Lee Hamilton, Andy Jacobs, that group--fine people, I hope they stay in Congress for thirty years.

Mc: Do you think Mr. Johnson has sort of revealed himself by the men that he has chosen to be on his staff? They are a group of very younger men, in many cases.

P: I think he has an affection for young men. He does not have sons, and to some extent the members of his staff become sons. I wouldn't want to overdo that. But he does show genuine interest in bringing along young men. You know I think a good example of that is Tom Johnson who's with him now. He has great affection, and should, and respect for Tom. I don't know anything about the Bill Moyers syndrome, pro or con, good or bad. He was gone when I got there.

I think he had a mix of people. He looked for competence and I don't know whether you can categorize his staff because they were all sorts. You had, you know, highly motivated aggressive types like Califano, you know, great minds, great vigor. You had--there's no more sensitive person in the world than Harry McPherson. He probably has the kindest and most decent instincts of any human being I've ever met, but effective. He has none of the toughness of some of the others, but, you know, I wish I were more like him. I wish I had that much of the milk of human kindness. Then, I suppose the classic question is always to range from them to Marvin Watson on the other hand. Is that you next question?

Mc: Yes.

P: Marvin was very good at Marvin's job, which was to be an administrator. He wasn't asking Marvin whether he ought to increase taxes, or what kind of consumer program he ought to have or what the budget ought to be--except the White House budget. Marvin, and then Jim Jones after Marvin left, were charged with the responsibility of looking at meticulous details as to the President's movements and the organization of the office and so forth. I think both of them were excellent at doing it. But you can't be all things, you know. If you're going to spend your time immersed in detail, you can't be thinking bold dreams at the same

time, at least not many minds work that way. So every President is going to have a Kenny O'Donnell, or a Marvin Watson, or now you know the knives are already out on Bob Haldeman. They're saying he's an autocrat "Von Haldeman," and all of this. And whoever has that job is going to get some of that. Now, I do think that Marvin could be a terrible nit-picker about some awfully minor things, you know--how many magazine subscriptions ought to be passed around and all of that--but I don't know. It would be a very hard job to ride herd on that bunch of prima donnas running around the White House, you know, playing God for their few years.

Marvin is rated by those who worked with him in the Post Office Department as an excellent Post Master General. I think it gave him a chance to come out of the darkness, to take on a job where he was principal and not just agent. I understand that he passed it with flying colors. He has just been given an enormous job as President of Occidental International. He is a very competent human being, and I got along with him fine. But, you know, different people are designed in this world to do different things, and I don't think we ought to expect them all to react alike, so I wouldn't knock him.

Mc: How general was Mr. Johnson's relation and rapport with the staff, would you say?

P: Oh, it was all over the lot and it varied by person and by his mood. You know you might be in for awhile and out for awhile. Those who had the job of sort of getting him around--you know I think he described Marvin once as his "get-me-to-the-church-on-time" man. But those who did a lot of the personal items when I first came were Marvin and Jake Jacobsen, then it evolved to Jim Jones and Larry Temple, and by the nature of their work they spent an immense amount of time with

him because they were traveling with him, making arrangements for him and so forth--communicating things from him to others. George Christian naturally spent an immense amount of time with him because the President very wisely felt that George ought to always have the flavor of his mood and his thought process, or else he couldn't communicate to the press. So that type of person was more apt to see him on a continuing basis. The others of us would see him dependent on whether he was focusing on something we were working on. You know, a lot of us had a lot of telephone contact and a lot of personal contact with him, but it could be quite sporadic and his moods ranged all the way from very formal, very brief, get-the-job-done to a desire to crack jokes or shoot the breeze into the evening. There was no particular pattern to it--from my standpoint. Perhaps others had a different experience.

Mc: Did generally members of the staff, from what you knew or heard, feel they had a fairly good access and rapport to the President?

P: Some did and some didn't--and I think everyone knew whether or not they did. Really, the question was whether the President was communicating directly to them and vice versa, or whether their primary responsibilities were to someone else who was in turn reporting to the President.

For example, some of the very brightest people around were the staff that Joe Califano assembled. Larry Levinson had a lot of direct contact with the President, although he functioned through Joe on a number of things--quite a few things. But people like Jim Gaither, Matt Nimetz, Fred Bowen, no brighter people around--but none of them really had any access to the President simply because of the way the machinery had been set up. They were massaging things for Joe and Joe

was taking them up with the President. Some of that prevailed in the Press office--not as much, because Tom Johnson of course had enormous contact with the President. That was the case in Congressional relations where the contact with the President was pretty much with Barefoot [Sanders] and Mike [Manatos] and Larry O'Brien, except when there were formal congressional relations meetings. So you just either had access or you didn't, and it wasn't necessarily because you were a better person. It was just the way the organization had evolved.

Mc: Did you ever feel or receive any instructions regarding any publicity regarding your work that you did--publicity versus anonymity of staff members?

P: I've heard the President describe his views on it on many occasions. He urged me to remain anonymous. He said he thought his staff was more effective when it did. He was ambivalent about it in the sense that there would be a period of time where he would be urging us to have contact with columnists and the press corps there in order to tell our story. And then there would be times of blackout where we were to avoid them like the plague.

Mc: What periods were these?

P: I can't give you dates, the avoid-like-the-plague time would normally follow a particularly unfavorable story on something. He is a sensitive man, and I think he over-reacted many times to adverse comments. It was a function of his terrible interest of everything that was going on--witness the tickers in his office and the TV sets and his total absorption with everything going on in Washington. On a baseball team you talk about someone with rabbit ears, who can hear anything that is yelled at him from the stands. Well, he had political rabbit ears. He could hear anything that was being said.

But you know it is easy for us to say that he shouldn't have been bothered by this. I've had very few instances where people have been taking pot shots at me in the press. Maybe my reaction would be the same as his. But he was very sensitive to anything that was said and there usually would be a flurry of activity to not be leaking things to the press after they had said something. And he preferred his aides to be anonymous. He felt, and I think rather correctly, that the aides that were written up consistently were those who were good news sources. So he would, I think, lean toward anonymity.

Mc: What occasions did your name appear in the press, Mr. Pierson?

P: Oh, in connection with the Fortas thing; we talked about that when I was asked to come testify; of course several times in connection with the Trans-Pacific Case; in connection with--well, there was some article on how trade policy was made; that sort of thing--not a lot, very little.

Mc: What was Mr. Johnson's response to these occasions?

P: You know, he knew I had been victimized on the Fortas' thing, so he was not unhappy with me about it. There were never any stories that reflected on him or that purported to tell the inside story that brought me into it, so I never had any very savage times on that--until, of course, we all regretted the Trans-Pacific thing where I was brought in as an inspiring rain-maker. That was after he'd left office.

Mc: Mr. Johnson has been described as a very demanding boss, and they occasionally cite even turn-overs in the staff among people. What is your feeling about that?

P: He's very demanding, but no one left during my time because they had been simply worked to exhaustion, or treated in such a manner they didn't feel they could stay on. But you know the principal reported

cases on those occurred before I came. My own view was that I expected to work very hard when I went there, and he could and did outwork anybody on the staff. I, you know, without being corny about it--the opportunity to work for the President and to work in the White House was, I felt, a remarkable and transient thing. I could not have kept the pace up for a lifetime. No one could, but to be able to do it for a couple of years was such fun that the--I was never unhappy because I had been worked hard. My wife was unhappy a few times.

Mc: Was your day as long as the Presidents?

P: No, oh, heavens no! I didn't get to the office until about 9:00 o'clock unless I went over to his bedroom for something. And of course he was up a couple hours before that. I usually left the office by 8:00-9:00 in the evening, and he was normally up until after mid-night or later or night reading. I'm sure you've had night reading described to you more times than you want to hear about it now.

Mc: I'll hear about it anytime. The President is also known for what is described as his telephonitis. Did you experience a great deal of this?

P: Yes, I did after he decided that he wanted me to do a lot. In the beginning I did not; in the last six or eight months I just--he does have telephonitis. I talked to him God knows how many times and at how many different hours. He does have the impulse to pick up the phone. It is much easier to talk to him about a specific matter. When he was in the hospital, right before last Christmas, he adopted the habit of calling about 9:00 or 10:00 o'clock at night and would say "what went on today?" It's very hard to make small talk with the President of the United States. If he just wants a general description of a day in Washington, it's hard to give that to him at night on the phone.

Mc: Do you have any classic examples of his late hour or early morning calls

to you that--of some crisis situation?

P: The first time he ever called me at home, I'd been working there a month, two months, and I remember the operator came on and said the President was on. About that time my children started fighting over some food at the dinner table, and they spilled milk all over me and a note pad I was using, and the place was just pandemonium. I couldn't hear a word he was saying, and I thought "My God, here I am talking to the President and my family is fighting around me."

The Christmas siege that we had, one evening I got home about 8:30 and he called and then he called again and then he called again. About this time Shirley said, "Well, I'm just going to take the phone off the hook because you've got to have some dinner."

So our son evidently took her at her word because he came trotting back in and said "I've taken the phone off the hook."

She said, "Oh, you can't do that, go put it back on." And as soon as he put it back on it rang!

It was the President and he was so flustered that he hung the phone up and went running back in and said, "The President is on the line," and when I came back there was the phone hung up.

And I said, "Are you sure someone's on the phone?"

He said, "Yes, I didn't mean to hang up."

And I picked up the phone and the voice at the other end of the line said, "Is anybody there?"

Mc: Mr. Pierson, Mr. Johnson is known for his temper or they talk about it. Did he ever have occasion to really dress you down or lose his temper with you? Or did you ever see it happen to a staff member?

P: He did indicate that I was less than intelligent a few times, but he didn't ever let me have it good. I was never exposed to a really severe

tongue lashing, nor was anyone else in my presence. He had a habit of, you know, sort of [an] off-hand manner of buttering you up at the expense of others who weren't there. He'd say, "Well you know I've asked old so and so to do something but I'm worried about whether he'll really get it done, because just too often he just goes off and doesn't do anything about this. And I wish you'd do so and so." I am quite confident that the same thing was done with the names reversed when I wasn't there. Maybe good comes from that to the country in motivating young people to go out and do things. I'm inclined to believe that on balance it's a bad habit, and didn't really serve the purpose for which it was intended. And I'm confident that the purpose for which it was intended was motivation, to motivate someone, you know, "By God, the President thinks I can do a better job than anyone else on this, so I'll go out and do it." And he did have a capacity for wringing the very best work out of people by a variety of brow-beating, flattery, cajoling, pleading, shouting. You know, you operated from affection and fear, and a lot was done. Maybe just as much would have been done without all of that. I don't know, I don't know.

Mc: He's, of course, on the opposite side of that he's known for his great benevolence and also his persuasive ability. Did you ever feel that?

P: Oh yes.

Mc: It's been referred to as the Johnson treatment.

P: Yes, oh yes, many times.

Mc: Such as what we've been talking about, I would imagine--

P: Yes, he was kind and flattering on many occasions. You know, in a sense it is a treatment. It made you want to go out and do a good job. You are flattered when you get attention from the President of the United States. Anyone who says he isn't is just a hypocrite.

Mc: Do you recall a particular occasion of this?

P: Well, yes. I hope this is in the context of the Johnson treatment because I don't want to sound like bragadocia. He got into the habit of introducing me to people I didn't know who might be with him somewhere, as "His best lawyer." He said, you know, "I've looked around at various lawyers," and said "this is my best lawyer." At the last Cabinet meeting, he was being very kind to everyone, and he went around thanking the various members of the Cabinet. Then he turned around and thanked different people in the staff and said, "I want to pay tribute to my best lawyer," and that was typically Johnsonian--part pretense, but mostly genuine affection for people who worked for him and who were working for him. It was a master-servant relationship, but it did leave you with affection for your master.

Mc: Mr. Pierson, have you read any of the books--there have been a whole slue of them that have come out--on Mr. Johnson and on the Johnson Administration? They range from William White's The Professional to Evans and Novak's The Exercise of Power. What is your opinion of--?

P: Yes, I've read both of those. I've read The Professional; I've read The Exercise of Power, both of them written before I went to the White House. I've read the excerpts from the Goldman book; I haven't read the Goldman book.

Mc: There is Sidey's The Personal President?

P: Yes, I've read that. I've read that because he dwelled at the end on the Sorenson caper with Bobby Kennedy and so I was particularly interested in that book. I thought Hugh Sidey's book was a pretty fair book of both the strengths and weaknesses of the President. The Evans and Novak book purported to be authoritative about so many matters that I know nothing about that I really don't have a very good judgment.

You know, I guess my own experience with them is that they don't let the facts stand in the way of a good story so often that I'm not confident that they would be any more accurate about the life of Lyndon Johnson.

Nor do I think that the William S. White book was a particularly good book for opposite reasons. I think it tended to gloss over the President's human characteristics and was something of a campaign biography. William S. White is a long-time friend of President Johnson. He has great affection for him and I think he lost some--not credibility--but some utility as an observer of the Washington scene because of his great affection for President Johnson. If a man writes day after day in a most objective way and then heaps rich praise on you the reader is very impressed with it. If a man always heaps rich praise on you, it's like the girl who dances every dance; it doesn't have the same meaning. And I think that became a problem, although William S. White, you know, is a fine and competent observer of the Washington scene--will probably be better with a President Nixon than with a President Johnson.

Mc: What is your opinion of the book The President's Men, particularly the section on the Johnson staff?

P: Very superficial. Written by someone who apparently really didn't have a lot of information on what went on. It's the sort of thing that you would write very quickly, not a professional job.

Mc: Mr. Pierson did you ever see any or feel any of the friction that supposedly existed between Kennedy people or Kennedys and the LBJ people?

P: Sure, sure.

Mc: Can you cite some instances of that? And do you think that there was an over-sensitivity to it?

P: On both sides there was an over-sensitivity. Here again, you see, I just saw part of it, and so the people that can really make a meaningful contribution to the history of this would be those who were on the scene during both the Kennedy and Johnson years and knew the personalities so much better.

President Johnson felt that most of the people close to President Kennedy really didn't like him very well. He felt that there was an effort to make a Texas bumpkin out of him by some of the intellectual elite--and there was some of that. There is, you know, at one end of the pole in this country an effort at intellectual sophistication that becomes so sophisticated it's no longer realistic--or relevant is I guess, the current term. I know I came to Washington a great fan of Arthur Schlesinger, having read the Age of Jackson, the Age of Roosevelt, and I thought his Kennedy book was excellent. He's an example of someone who can become overly snide and engage in sophistry.

So you had people justifiably goading Johnson at one end, and then you have his great sensitivity at the other end. I don't know how much of a shot-gun marriage the 1960 ticket was; I have no inside information on that; but you just had two very different groups. Adding to that the terrible emotional trauma of the assassination of President Kennedy, where overnight the Johnson group had to take hold, had to--he was an interloper, and it's fair to say that many people still look for the restoration, right now! So, there was terrible, continuing friction.

The President always felt that Bobby Kennedy would run against him in 1968--long before it was popular to think there was any prospect of that. The first time I heard him say that I thought, "How ridiculous. He really has an obsession about this." But he was a little closer to the truth than anyone thought, you know. If it appeared that the

President was vulnerable, there was going to be serious thought given to it. So that kind of high-stakes political rivalry would bring enormous friction. But that's only one side of the story. And the other side of the story was there were an enormous number of people that made a big accommodation and bridged that gap. The Mac Bundys and the Dean Rusks and the Orville Freemans and Stewart Udalls, perhaps less because there was later friction there, but all of them in one sense or another did bridge the gap. I think it's important that it was a gap that needed to be bridged. There wasn't a Johnson government in exile waiting to spring into action. He needed these people, and I guess that's what the political system's all about really--is shifting loyalties to some extent. The system is stronger than a single man. So, yes, the frictions were there.

Mc: Did Mr. Johnson ever talk with you about any of the Kennedy, so-called Kennedy people.

P: Certainly, many times.

Mc: Particular ones?

P: I never heard him say a derogatory thing about President Kennedy. I've heard him say good things about him many times, never an ugly or a cutting or a snide thing. Whether that was genuine respect or affection, or respect for the office, or whether he just didn't say anything to me, I don't know. He distrusted Bob Kennedy. That's not a very revealing thing, although I think he admired his toughness. He thought some of it was misdirected. He had no communication with him at all. There was no contact between the two of them. He liked Ted Sorenson; he felt betrayed by Dick Goodwin. He brought Dick Goodwin back to the White House you know and put a typewriter back in his hot hand--and no favor goes unpunished in his eyes. I didn't ever hear him talk much

about Ted Kennedy. Ted Kennedy was sort of a peripheral figure in the rivalries at that time. My impression is that they got along pretty well. But he had no doubts as to where Ted's loyalties lay and from that standpoint he was a member of a potential rival camp.

Mc: Did your friendship with Ted Sorenson put you in any sensitive relationship or--?

P: No, no, because first, I don't think the President was aware of it until Ted came to the White House and we began to talk about ways that maybe we could bring a little more unity to the situation for 1968. I said to him at that time--I said to the President that I had a decent--I should say you know, Ted Sorenson and I are not real close friends; we have just had a continuing contact and pleasant friendship over the years--that would he like to see him, and he said yes, and I think the President maintains a very good friendship with Ted. So, no there wasn't any sensitivity there. Second, Ted was a dove on the Bobby syndrome. He wanted to keep him out of the race, he wasn't trying to get him in. So the President would regard him as friendly in that sense. And third, I think the President trusted me. I don't think he ever thought I was going to violate any confidence of his to his detriment with Ted Sorenson or anyone else. So, no, I didn't think that.

Mc: What was your assessment of the growing and very vivid, very personal press criticism. Of course, it kind of began in 1966 but reached its height over the last few years while you were there.

P: I guess some of it is the kind of criticism that a vigorous President gets. Most of it was Viet Nam, I believe, because Viet Nam alienated the liberal community with its effect on the media. And I say that dispassionately, not as an evil to be corrected--but simply as a fact. And the emotions ran so high that he was just going to get criticized

a lot as a result of that.

Then you add to that equation his own characteristics, his intense desire for secrecy, which was true. He believed that he was in a better position to make the right decision, if "his options were open," if there hadn't been so much discussion about something that there had been the predictable public response to whatever it was and it had been thrashed around so much then it became a problem of whether he would fly into the face of an already existing public gale. He believed he could guard against that by not having it talked about in advance. I think in many instances he was simply wrong about his capacity to control the public dialogue on this and that instead of accomplishing his purpose--which I don't think was an evil purpose, but was his way of attempting to govern--that he caused a level of adverse comment which otherwise wouldn't exist. And, you know, I think he made mistakes there, and they increased the criticism on it.

Mc: Did you ever see any, or were you aware, of any intentional misleading of information that sort of stemmed from what became known as the "credibility gap?"

P: Yes. He would say whatever he believed he ought to be saying at a particular time, and it was not always an accurate statement.

Mc: Can you think of examples of that?

P: I guess the prime example that nobody has ever been able to understand is why, he made the statements he did about not taking the campaign trip in 1966--was it 1966 or 1968? Where he denied he ever had plans made to take the trip. It simply wasn't a fact. It was just a senseless act from a public relations standpoint. I think it sprang there from just a momentary irritation that he had been committed publicly to doing something. He was just sensitive beyond reason on it.

I think many times he tended to engage not as much in deceit as in hyperbole. When he got in the fuss with Governor Romney about whether he had sent troops into Detroit in a timely manner--I did do a little legal work on that as a matter of fact. We looked at the Constitution and the statute and I got the legislative history on it and we found some of the floor debate back in 1793, I think, on the statute. I showed him the excerpts from the floor debate, where it was--no question about it--said, "We're concerned about giving the President the right to send troops into a sovereign state, and it should only take place when the head of the state has specifically requested it and it's clear that the state can't cope with the situation." He seized on the debate and of course saw a series of correspondents. I know the first one he saw that day he said something to the effect, "You know there was debate on this as far back as 1793," and at the end of the day when he was seeing another one, I heard him say, "If you'll recall the great debate of 1793," and that was the progression of it during the day.

So, you know, he was such a violatile, enthusiastic advocate of his position, which I'm not certain really answers your question as to deliberate witholding of information or misrepresentation. I don't think I was ever present where he talked to a newsman and just said something was black when it was white. He was more inclined to shade it the way he felt was most in accord with his strategy for managing that situation. But that too creates a credibility gap. So it was a real problem.

Mc: Were you ever in the capacity of, under instruction, leaking something?

P: Sure.

Mc: What?

P: The first thing I ever leaked was on the question of the allotment that would be set for rice. And rice is, of course, a very important commodity in Viet Nam. There was a large dispute as to whether we would cut back the domestic rice allotment, and all of the Senators and Congressmen from the rice states were absolutely up in arms at the thought that the allotment might be cut back--less rice production for their people--Senator Ellender, et al. So the President had me leak a story to the Washington Post and The Washington Star that a great debate was going on within the Administration and that the President, in view of the estimates he was getting from other countries, was prepared to cut the production back. This really caused a flurry, and Senator Ellender and another group requested an audience with the President.

Mc: Did you do this through a writer or columnist?

P: Yes, yes. So one evening they all came in--about twenty-five of them, or maybe not that many, ten or fifteen--and spent about an hour telling the President all of the bad things that were going to happen if he cut back rice production. About mid-way during the meeting he called me over and whispered to me that when they finished that he wanted to have me make the strongest case I could make for cutting back production. So they finished, and he said "Well, I'm concerned about this." He said, "There are others that think it ought to be cut back." He said, "What do you think about it, DeVier?" And I did make the strongest case I could for cutting back and, you know, to the great loss of friendship of all of the Congressmen and Senators in the room.

Then they started the plea again and he finally said, "Well, it was a terribly difficult decision for him to make, but he would think on it." So after a couple of days he said, "You call around to Ellender

and the others and tell them that I have decided, in view of their personal interest in this that I won't do it, but I'll be needing their help on some other matters." This is chip-building in the classic sense, and he built some chips with some critical people by making them ask for something that I suspect he intended to do all the way along.

You know, you ask yourself, is that good or bad and if, for example, those additional votes were for a matter that you would regard as being a great step forward in social progress you might say, "Well, it was worth one evening with the rice people--and one story leaked to the Washington press that stimulated the rice people to come in to get that done." So these are the sort of questions that I think we'll be left with in the Johnson years.

Mc: That particular instance is sort of in the form of a trial balloon--

P: Sure.

Mc: Do you have other occasions where this happened?

P: Well, he ran up a lot of trial--he varied a good deal. Sometimes he wanted to run up trial balloons and sometimes he didn't want any baloons up. He ran up a number of trial balloons on the tax bill--the need for it, the level. I think he may have run up a trial balloon or two on the SST, when they were worrying about whether to put any funds in the budget for it, whether you could stretch out the research and development time on it. He did it--

Mc: Did you have other occasions of doing this type of leaking of trial balloons, or whatever you want to call them?

P: Oh, I did, nothing else comes to mind really.

Mc: To what do you attribute primarily Mr. Johnson's unpopularity?

P: Viet Nam. Those who hold that it was the Johnson personality or the Johnson style, you know, I think forget the immense popularity that he

maintained during the time that the actions that he was taking as President were popular easy actions to take. You know, I think Presidential popularity for all Presidents rises and falls with good or bad times. Viet Nam has been a bad time for the American people. I know it was President Johnson's view that had he chosen to run again that he could have been nominated and elected. That was his view. But he felt that he couldn't have governed, that he would have been elected in a very, very bitter three-way race, as a minority president and with a majority of people opposing him personally and his views and that it would have been four years of misery for him and for the American people. So I think, you know, had Viet Nam either not occurred, or had the American escalation resulted in a rapid capitulation, and American lives had not been lost, and the budget impact had not been the way it was on domestic programs and on the economy, that it was coming up roses for him.

Mc: Mr. Pierson, did you see much interest in Mr. Johnson in the polls of his popularity.

P: He had great interest in them. He did on occasion pull polls out of his pocket, but more often he just knew what they said and could quote from them or would ask someone to "go get me the poll on so and so." He had some very favorable polls from the North East in early 1968. Pennsylvania, New York, all showed him running far ahead of every Republican candidate. And incidentally the Humphrey showing in those states indicates the great residual strength for a Democratic candidate. He would have probably carried those states. So they were showing very well and he quoted those at great length. When the total popularity polls were good, he would make some mention of it, although during my time there they weren't so good, so I didn't hear so much about that.

We did talk political polls until he made his decision on March 31.

Mc: Did he place much credulance in them?

P: I think he was fairly sophisticated about it. He understands polling techniques, and he knows a poll is as good as the technique of the pollster. I think he was pleased when they were good, but didn't regard it as a conclusive matter. You know, he's a wise politician.

Mc: Do you think Mr. Johnson was a little too sensitive to criticism or too concerned for his own public and personal image?

P: Yes, I do, but as I've said before, hyper-sensitive to criticism. I do think we have to temper our criticism of that characteristic by, you know, wondering how any public man reacts or feels at criticism directed toward him. So, we perhaps ought to think twice when we criticize a public man for sensitivity to public criticism. But he was most sensitive and more sensitive--I think it would have been helpful if he'd simply let it go by and laughed about it rather than worrying about it, mainly because he just had better things to do with his time than to worry about what every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the country was thinking about.

Mc: Do you recall a particular occasion where something really galled him during your time there?

P: I think the consistent opposition to him by some columnists that he regarded as being out to get him galled him more than a low popularity poll--something like that. I've heard him a hundred times--now I'm exaggerating--I've heard him many, many times complain that he had never gotten a square shake from particular columnists or something like that. I think that was a source of irritation.

Mc: Who were these particular ones that you're thinking of?

P: I heard him complain about Evans and Novak a good deal. He had very mixed emotions about Hugh Sidey. I've heard him both sides--I think he respected Hugh as a professional, I certainly do, but he was down on him from time to time. He was just very sensitive, and anybody that wrote an ugly thing, he didn't think he should have had an ugly thing written about him.

Mc: Did he sort of evidence this in the way of being concerned for his public image as President?

P: Well of course he was concerned for his public image! But I think that's a legitimate concern of a President. A President who is Chief Executive, Chief Tribune, Chief Educator of the country had better be concerned about his public image, because you must have some reasonable amount of public support for whatever position you're going to take. So if you have such a bad image in the sense that people will not follow your lead, that you can't lead, well then it affects your ability to govern, so he was naturally and legitimately concerned about that.

Mc: That's the end of this tape.

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By W. DeVier Pierson

to the

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