INTERVIEW XXII

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Reedy's office, Marquette University, Milwaukee

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R: --was the name of the executive director? That was almost all cut and dried office work. There were no political overtones or anything else. It's just what it appears to be. And it wound up with some memos from Ed [Edward C. Welsh], which were done in such a form that Johnson could present them to Kennedy. But that's cut and dried. There are no . . . There is nothing hidden. Have you talked to Ed Welsh about it? I would.

G: The lunar program did come under attack by Congress that year from a budgetary standpoint.

R: I wouldn't say attack; there were questions raised.

G: What was LBJ's role in it?

R: Well, it was the President's Space Council, that is, Advisory Committee on Outer Space Sciences, Engineering and Technology [National Aeronautics and Space Council], which at first set the goal of landing a man on the moon before 1980. I still remember that meeting, which was--the meeting itself, for anything that perfunctory, was rather cut and dried. There was a meeting, the various members of the Space Council, Ed Welsh read this concept of landing a man on the moon and that was it; it was adopted.

G: No discussion?

R: Not really, because there wasn't too much to discuss at that point; Ed's memo had covered all of the salient facts, and you see, the main thing here is you were setting a goal rather than laying out a program. You have to have a goal in order to lay out a program; you've got to know where you're going. And the point here was to determine--now that we'd gotten a man into space--the point was to have some fixed point around which we would develop programs.

Now, that was about the time when there was some serious discussion among scientists and technical people as to whether manned space flights shouldn't be abandoned altogether, on the grounds that they added extra difficulties to the program, and that just as much information, if not even more information, could be gotten by loading the satellites with various types of sensing equipment that would pick up things as they went along. Welsh's memo answered that, that we still had to gather certain types of information that could not be picked up by sensing instruments, and that therefore the sensible goal was to land a man on the moon, because in the course of doing that we would have to do a lot of research into the biological problems associated with outer space. Just the space instruments didn't raise those problems. There was very little discussion. It was adopted.

Now, I think what you saw in Congress was not really opposition quite so much as it was questioning, because some of the scientists who believed in unmanned space flights had managed to get the ear of some members of Congress, which was inevitable. But again, I wouldn't make too much of it, and Johnson's role in this whole thing was relatively minor.

G: There were also charges that duplication existed between the NASA programs and the Defense Department programs.

H: Those charges had been there from the beginning, and it is true and I think it's probably still true. You have to realize something here: when the NASA program got going, what it really had to do was to borrow from all of the military programs. The navy had had a program; the air force had had a program; the army had had a program. They had already developed all of the rocketry; they had developed the mathematics; they had developed the need for certain types of materials research. And what NASA really did was to take these things and give them a civilian orientation, but it would be impossible not to be doing some duplicating work. The charges were true, except so what?

G: Was there also competition?

R: Between the services?

G: Between NASA and the military?

R: No, not so much between NASA and the military. The competition was between the various military branches, all of whom were afraid that if they gave something to NASA, it would go to another military branch. It was really funny to sit in on a meeting of the ballistics people from the army, navy and the air force. They'd all sit there looking at each other, you know, to be goddamn sure no secrets were being given away. They'd all make some absurd claims. The army made an absurd claim--and it was absurd--that its missiles were mobile, which the air force missiles were not. Well, they were mobile all right, in the sense that you could put them on a train car and haul them ten or twelve thousand miles. But they needed a silo just the same way the air force program needed

silos. The navy, of course, had developed the solid fuels which turned out to be so very essential to the whole program. But I'd say that was the only real problem, that of the services being afraid that by cooperating with NASA they'd be releasing stuff to the other services.

The only commentary I would add is this. One of the things that happened to us was the same thing that happened to the Germans in World War II. That is, they started out with such an overwhelming preponderance of aerial weapons that what the nations that were fighting them had to do was to kind of leapfrog and to go over into newer forms. Well, what happened to us after World War II, we had this overwhelming concentration of air power, and it was overwhelming. There is no doubt about it. We had the mightiest air force on the whole globe, and the result was that because we had this heavy advantage, we did not explore a number of new directions that other nations did explore. The Russians, for example, unquestionably got their lead in rocketry--and they had it--simply because they had realized they could never catch up with us in air force. Therefore they had to leapfrog and develop something new, and we were caught napping on it. The situation was not as bad as we said it was, or rather as Kennedy put it on advice from us--we were at fault there during the 1960 campaign; it wasn't nearly as bad as that--but the Russians were still way ahead of us. They had developed, as I recall, a rocket with a million-pound thrust, and we weren't even within shouting distance of a rocket with a million-pound thrust. We eventually wound up with about 300,000-pound thrust, and we'd hook three of them together in order to get those rockets off the ground.

Now the other thing was that we also, at that point, were very, very dominant in terms of the air, in terms of commercial aviation, simply because we made all the airplanes. It didn't matter if you were traveling KLM or BEA or Scandinavia or Air France; you were traveling in an American-made airplane, which meant that in effect America was still dominant. And so what happened is that both Britain and France again started thinking of leapfrogging. Now the way to leapfrog was to get into supersonic speeds, and so again we were caught napping. The British and the French both got way, way ahead of us, even with some of our technicians and engineers pooh-poohing them. And what was happening here is we were trying to play catch-up, which we didn't. And we didn't succeed. That's sort of a broad, general commentary. Otherwise, everything that you need to know is in there. You might ask Ed Welsh.

G: Okay, this is a memorandum from you to the Vice President dated January 12, 1963, with regard to press stories.

R: Press speculation, actually.

G: Regarding Robert Kennedy and his presidential aspirations.

R: Right. I don't think anybody quite said it, but there had been a number of columnists who had left a very clear inference that Kennedy was engaged in trying to dump Lyndon Johnson from the vice presidency in 1964, because he himself was going to want to take a shot at the presidency, and what he had to do was to eliminate Johnson as a factor between 1964 and 1968. Now, there were a number of things there. That was also the period when Johnson for some reason had picked up this nonsense about daily briefings, and various other things, all of which he blamed on Bobby Kennedy. What I was trying

to do there was to give him something of an education on how the press worked. If there had been daily briefings, I would have known about them. What I put down--what I did, if you read the memo carefully, I gave him the kind of logic that most journalists would follow, the kind of logic that would produce those stories. Those stories were not produced out of anything that Bobby Kennedy did. If anything, I thought those leaks were very, very useful. But I was also trying to give him some peace of mind because, you know, he was sensitive as a boil to any kind of criticism, and he never realized that sometimes criticism can be very helpful in that it generates sympathy.

Now, what I wrote there was absolutely valid. I think this is one of the most helpful things that happened to him during that period. It made Bobby look kind of cheap, like the little guy who was trying to knife somebody so he could build his own fortunes. It made Johnson the center of all of the non-Kennedy forces in the Democratic Party, and believe it or not, the non-Kennedy forces--they were rather overwhelming. They were much larger than the pro-Kennedy forces. Much larger, but you see, they weren't united. Kennedy had succeeded in uniting all of his people. The rest of the Democratic party could only--a lot of which was anti-Kennedy--just simply couldn't get together; they were divided by too many issues. The ultraliberals, for instance, for whom Kennedy wasn't liberal enough; the old New Dealers who kind of looked upon Kennedy as the son of the man who had given Roosevelt a lot of trouble; the southerners--all of those people, they simply couldn't get together. I wrote that memo for him and I think he bought it, although he still didn't like it.

G: Did he ask for the memo or did he--?

R: No, no. Oh no.

G: Did you write it in response to an expression on his part?

R: No. It just hit me that that was the time to write that memo and I did. Very few of my memos were ever in response to a request from him. Most of my memos were memos I just thought I ought to write at the time.

Let me push that criticism a little bit further, though. We were talking about Cyprus yesterday and I mentioned his anger at the press because they said the Greeks had boycotted him. You learn an awful lot about Lyndon Johnson when you ponder that particular episode. Again, as I have just finished saying in connection with this, he regarded any criticism of him for any reason as being something that was tearing him down. So when the press said that the Greeks were boycotting him, it didn't occur to him at all [that] of course the Greeks were boycotting him, not because of him, Lyndon Baines Johnson, but boycotting him because he was the United States, at which they were mad. And he took things like that very personally. If somebody in a foreign crowd threw an egg at him, it wasn't because he was representing the United States. It was because somebody hated Lyndon Johnson. He was always citing what happened to [Richard] Nixon down in Caracas, you know, when the eggs were thrown and all that kind of thing. Of course, Nixon wasn't to blame for that. In fact, I don't think it hurt Nixon, either, and I don't think it hurt him [LBJ]. Even this story that this communist leader turned his back on him, he regarded that as being a bad one because it was a personal criticism of Lyndon Johnson, to him. I remember that when I was able to talk about [it], I said, "Okay, do you want me to put a story out that the communist leader shook your hand warmly and said,

'Brother, I'm glad you're here to help me establish communism'"? He was absolutely impossible on that point. That's a rather good memo, rereading [it]. I'm glad I wrote it.

G: There is an inference here that Johnson himself was a potential candidate in 1968.

R: If so, I didn't intend it because I didn't know about 1968.

G: Do you think he regarded himself as a potential candidate in 1968?

R: No. I think he thought the vice presidency was the end of the road.

G: Was there any discussion or thought during this period about who the successor to Kennedy would be?

R: No, because it was assumed--and I think assumed incorrectly, because I didn't assume it--it was assumed that Kennedy would get reelected, and I myself thought that he could not get reelected. I was pretty well convinced that unless the Republicans did something absolutely asinine, that they would nominate somebody like [Nelson A.] Rockefeller or [William W.] Scranton, either one of whom I think could have defeated Kennedy at that point. The Kennedy Administration--don't forget it was a minority administration to begin with; it did not have a majority of the people. It only had a plurality. But there had been too many swimming pools, too many parties, too much [Pablo] Casals, not enough rock 'n roll, not enough, it had become a little bit sort of precious. And also, it hadn't done very much. If you want to take a look at the Kennedy Administration--I know most of the Kennedys' followers said, well, that's because it takes a little bit of time; you have to work in the office. Well, that's not true. I know American history too well for that. All of the famous presidents--with the exception of the wartime presidents--all the presidents that became famous did what they did during the first two years, then fell off,

even Roosevelt. The whole New Deal was in the first two years, or virtually all the New Deal. But even I thought that the way things were going was building up to a Republican victory in 1964. Now, the Kennedy people today tell me that Barry Goldwater was going to be the opponent anyway. Then yes, Kennedy could have defeated Barry Goldwater. *I* could have defeated Barry Goldwater, simply because Barry Goldwater wasn't interested in winning. He wasn't looking for votes, he was looking for converts. He didn't want you to come to him unless you were washed in the blood of the Lamb. But I don't think Goldwater would have been the candidate in 1964 if Kennedy had been the Democratic candidate. I think what happened--well, that's getting ahead of ourselves.

G: Do you view the Goldwater nomination as a response to the Democratic superiority?

R: Yes, I think what happened--and this is a fairly common phenomenon in American history, it has happened before. In a year where a political party does not have a chance, it tends to nominate its extremists. Not because of any conscious design, don't misunderstand me there. I am not telling you that the top Democrats sit down and say, well, we can't win this year so we'll give them Vito Marcantonio, or the top Republicans say we can't win this year so we give them Barry Goldwater. I think what happens is that the candidates, the more serious candidates, say wait a minute. Why should I waste my time and energy in a battle that I can't win? And therefore they hold back.

Rockefeller, you'll notice, held back and so did Scranton, in the early stages of the campaign in 1964. It wasn't until they realized that Goldwater was giving the Republican party a terrible appearance that they got into the fray, and they got into the fray much too late. By the time they got in, Goldwater had most of the delegates sewed up. The last

chance was California, and I think the birth of that baby to Nelson Rockefeller took care of California. It gave it to Goldwater.

But you see, it's also helpful in another way. The extremists always hold the myth that if you were to nominate one of them, all kinds of people would come out of the woodwork and vote for them. Every liberal believes that, that if you nominate a liberal Democrat lots of people that don't vote are going to come out and vote for him. And conservatives believe [that if] you nominate a conservative, lots of conservatives are going to come out and vote for him. All of which is sheer nonsense. And I think that when--Johnson's conduct in taking over the presidency after the Kennedy assassination was the most magnificent thing he ever did. God, it was breathtaking, how good he was. He really reassured the country. You know that an assassination of a president is a terribly unsettling thing, and everybody looking at the way Johnson was handling himself knew immediately that he was going to win so easy in 1964. It wasn't even worth the contest. It was almost too bad that we had to spend the money on the campaigns and on the election.

(Interruption)

--part of a series of memos that Buz [Horace Busby] wrote to them, all of which were basing themselves on what I was trying to do, too. Here we approach one of Johnson's greatest weaknesses: he never understood the necessity for understanding what he was doing. That may sound a little peculiar. All he wanted out of a memorandum was an idea of doing something, and if you gave him the kind of memoranda that he wanted, it might work out very well. Except the next time, when something arose that was similar,

he'd do it the same way without realizing that things quite often look alike but really aren't. Usually what happened with memos like that--he would call a meeting . . . I remember one in particular really excellent memo that Buz wrote, shortly after he took over as vice president, in which Buz had a series of recommendations, but fundamentally what was at heart were things that he had to do and things he had to understand. Well, Buz and I both tried to explain it to him, and he was obviously skeptical, and he finally said, "Well, you and Busby take this and implement it," and walked out. Well, we couldn't; he had to implement it. But that's what that is basically, one of Buz's efforts to make him understand what he was doing. You probably heard the story--he was very fond of it--how he hated to ask George the right time because George was quite likely to give him a lecture on the sidereal motion of the stars. Well, goddamn, he would have been better off if he'd listened to some of those lectures. He got himself into a lot of trouble because he didn't understand some of my recommendations. He got himself into bad trouble a couple of times. You know about the railroad strike?

G: Tell me.

R: This is after he became president. The railroads went on strike and back in those days, in 1963 or early 1964, whichever it was, the railroads were still important as all get out. This is after I had become press secretary, so it would have been 1964, I guess. And he said, what do you do? He'd always turn to me for advice on labor; he had me pegged as the only one that knew anything about labor. And I said, "What you do, Mr. President, you call in the heads of the unions, you call in the heads of the railroads, you take them over to the Senate Office Building"--no, to the old State Department, now that White

House office building--and I said, "You lock them up in a room without a toilet and turn up the heat and tell them to come through with an agreement." Well, they did; they came through with an agreement. And [it was] really marvelous. He had that wild dash through the streets, that sort of thing he dearly loved, behind sirens screaming, and Friday night he was able to get on national TV and tell the American people that they were going to have railroad service and that little brat--whatever her name was--her grandmother could come to her christening.

Well, time goes by and the machinists went on strike in the airlines. And I was walking down the street when I thought--this is after I had left the White House--and the thought suddenly hit me. "My God, he's going to call in the heads of the union and call in the heads of the airlines and lock them up [behind] a door for an agreement." I ran like hell to the nearest telephone. I couldn't get him; he was in a meeting. I couldn't get Harry McPherson; I couldn't get anybody. Before I finished telephoning the announcement came out that he'd called them into the White House. [I thought,] "Oh, my God, what's going to happen to him now shouldn't happen to Adolf Hitler." (Laughter)

They came to an agreement all right, which anybody knew that they would. Friday, the machinists voted [on] the agreement and voted it down. And there he was left, and of course he had had this wild dash to a TV station to announce the agreement. Did he have egg on his face. After that, what he did, he called in Wayne Morse, and Wayne Morse took them as far down the street as he could get away from the White House, and worked out an agreement.

But he [LBJ] didn't know; he thought that all labor was alike. He didn't realize, first of all, that the national officers of the machinists' union have, or least in those days had, very little influence with the union. The only reason they had an international president was that they had a seat on the executive committee of the AFL-CIO, and they had to have somebody to fill that seat. So they elected somebody harmless as international president.

But secondly, there is an old tradition among the machinists, or was at that point, and everybody who was involved in labor relations knew about it, in which the machinists always voted down the first offer submitted by management, always. [In] some early strike, they had been given an offer and the leadership had advised the membership to turn it down, so they got about 5 or 10 per cent more than they would have gotten otherwise. And at that point it was almost a joke. People that were experienced at labor relations always offered the machinists 5 per cent less than they intended to give them. You'd get that voted down, then you'd come back to your 5 per cent increase--you know, it'd become like a mating dance, or something like that. And by the way, the real power in the machinists is in the lodge chairmen. That's where the power is, and the lodge chairmen weren't in there negotiating that agreement.

Now, if he had only had enough sense to listen to me over the years, he would have known that the machinists were a totally different type of union than the railroad brotherhoods, operated under different rules, had different traditions, and this got him in trouble many times in his life, many times.

G: Aside from attempting to help LBJ understand the imaging tasks, there seems to have been a substantive component of upgrading his image as well.

R: Oh, sure.

G: Why was Busby doing that?

R: Well, I was trying to do the same thing. He had no understanding, none, of the value of the public image. He didn't know what you were talking about. To him public relations consisted of the perpetration of stunts, of things that would attract public attention on a large scale. A lot of public relations [was] in terms of putting a midget in Morgan's lap when he testifies in front of a committee, or the world's tallest dwarf or world's shortest giant, that sort of thing. And it never occurred to him that in politics there is such [a] thing as a public image, which is all important. How does the public, generally speaking, define the political person? How does it look upon the political leader? Does it regard the political leader as being trustworthy? Does it regard the political leader as being ingenious? Does it regard the political leader as being honest? Does it regard the political leader as being patriotic? And he did not understand that at all. The closest he ever came to it--he knew how to do certain things that would be attractive to certain people. That business of walking through the White House and turning out the lights wherever they weren't needed; he knew that would make a big hit on Wall Street. Its people would say, now there's a man that knows the value of a dollar. But both Buz and I were--at times we just despaired because he didn't realize that what was important here were not the spectacular stunts, but the nonspectacular things that would leave the public saying, now there's an honest man. Now there's a man with intelligence. Now there's a

man that's got my interest at heart. Buz wrote him a number of memos that way. And as I said, in each case he'd say, "Well, Busby and Reedy, implement it." The man had certain blind sides to him, and that was one of them.

G: How could he have improved his image as vice president?

R: Oh, all sorts of things at that point, but it was mostly up to him. He was moping too goddamn much and it was becoming obvious. He just looked lugubrious. He reminded me of one of those Tennessee bloodhounds, you know, with the drooping ears. That was one thing. And then he was . . . [doing] certain rather foolish things. I think we've already gone over that business early in the administration, where he tried to take over the armed forces. Boy, oh boy. And he fought like hell against that trip around the world. Boy, did he fight that one, because again he thought that this was a Bobby Kennedy plot to have a crowd boo him somewhere, and that the booing would tear him down in pubic esteem. What he needed, he needed to be somewhat more relaxed. He needed more intellectual contact. I know I tried to get him and Walter Prescott Webb together. God, that would have been . . . And I finally succeeded, but not nearly as well as I would like to have.

G: Okay.

R: You're going to find more memos like that in the file, I'm sure.

(Interruption)

G: Let me ask you to talk about the 1963 civil rights bill.

R: Sure, yes. This I know full well. On this particular memorandum, when I first read the bill, I became very much concerned about a long preamble. One of the things that I had

learned from Richard Brevard Russell is [that] the most dangerous thing you can do to a bill is a preamble; that it may make good reading for the press, but you're going to turn off more votes with a preamble than you're ever going to get. And this preamble was terrible. Well, you got the impression from reading it that the whole reason for civil rights is that blacks couldn't travel to summer resorts--I mean, that's not what it said, but--I'd have to have the actual text in front of me. But it really made the whole civil rights thing look rather ridiculous, as though it were just a question of that they couldn't go to Las Vegas or something of that nature. Oh, also, on page 9, paragraph 4--and this is all preamble. It appears we're passing this bill for the economic benefit of theater owners, who would otherwise be deprived of Negro customers. *That's the way it sounded.* And then department-store owners . . . The fact [that] they couldn't hold their conventions in certain cities . . . And then the most important single thing they had almost buried, which is that segregated facilities hamper both workers and employers in exercising a free choice as to where and whom they are going to work with. I know the main thing--I don't think he did submit it to anybody else. He put me on the phone to Ted Sorensen, and he was on another phone listening to our conversation. I remember that I felt it might be best if I left him out of it. I would say, "Well, I think, Ted"--and he growled at me, "*We* think." But I made all the points with Ted, and I don't think that I impressed Ted because they didn't change the bill any. The bill was sent to Congress with all of those things in it. Oh, I think they may have changed one or two. And as you know, it hit the congressional deep freeze, and which--it was bound to. Later, after Johnson became president, what he did was to use the assassination as a means for

putting that bill through Congress. He gave them the "one more for the Gipper" pep talk, and I think they changed it around in committee and may have taken the whole damn preamble out. I hope so. God, I would have had trouble voting for the bill with that preamble, even though I know it didn't have any force of law.

G: Did LBJ feel that the administration had not done sufficient homework in terms of Congress (inaudible)?

R: Worse than that. He didn't feel that the administration really understood Congress, which it didn't. You know, the fact that Jack had been a member all those years--I don't think Jack ever really understood Congress fully. I don't think he was interested in it. That's the trouble. The only Kennedy that was interested in it was Teddy. Teddy has been a damn good senator, but he has the temperament. But neither Jack nor Bobby had the congressional temperament nor understood it. They were executive types.

G: Did LBJ feel that he was not consulted sufficiently in preparation for this bill?

R: He never said that to me, no. But he sure wasn't. Because if he had been I don't think that stuff would ever have gone through that way. The bill was incredibly badly drafted.

G: Was one difference in emphasis between the 1963 version and the 1964 version [that it became] a moral issue under Johnson?

R: Oh, yes. Actually, of course it was a moral issue under this too, that's what they thought they were doing with that idiotic preamble. But what they were doing, really, with the preamble was making it almost entirely an issue of social status rather than an issue of one's place in society. What Johnson did was to make the whole thing a moral

imperative, but also giving it that extra fillip of "this one we'll do for our late martyred president," and I'm pretty sure that some of that objectionable language got taken out.

G: Any insights on his speech to Gettysburg in June?

R: Is that the one about we freed the black from his chains but not from the color of his skin? That, I think, was Buz. No. No great particular insight. I don't think there is anything there that's not apparent. See, it was quite obvious that really there was a greater rapport between Johnson and minorities than there was between Kennedy and minorities. Many liberals didn't realize that. Jews were very suspicious of Kennedy because of his father. They weren't a bit suspicious of Johnson. Blacks were kind of indifferent to Kennedy. But what he did was, that finally brought them in, was that call to Coretta King when Martin Luther King was tossed in the [Georgia state prison]. And of course the Latinos, they thought Johnson was the greatest invention since sliced bread. But there was nothing out of the ordinary about that Gettysburg speech; it was the way he felt.

G: Did it have a significant impact?

R: Oh yes, oh yes. I think that that was the beginning of the public understanding that when it came to civil rights, this man really meant it. And after his death, I think it was the head of the NAACP, Whitney Young, who wrote a column which said this was the only president that was for us.

G: That would have been Roy Wilkins or . . .

R: Yes, that's right, Roy Wilkins. I'll never forget that column.

(Tape 1 of 1, Side 2)

R: We met at Otis Air Force Base, and Johnson and I went in to see Kennedy at Squaw Island. Kennedy was there, and Jackie, and Postmaster [J. Edward] Day, who mentions this incident, by the way, in his book [*My Appointed Round: 929 Days as Postmaster General*], although he doesn't have quite the same reaction to it that I did. At that particular point, Jackie was trying to get those chandeliers back from the Senate--you know, the chandeliers that Teddy Roosevelt sent up there because they kept them awake at night. And she really put on an act for Johnson, one of those cute little baby-girl things with the eyelashes fluttering. She was there with that big bouffant hairdo, and white sailor pants, and sort of an Oxford crew sweater, and it was--there really wasn't very much to it, just sort of an enjoyable thing with--one of the Kennedy children came, and I remember Jack played with him for a little bit while talking to us. Then we went on back in the airplane and flew.

G: Did Johnson agree to help with the chandeliers at that point?

R: No, but she got the chandeliers. He had already agreed to help, I think.

G: What did he do specifically?

R: Well, I don't know, but the way he would have to go about something like that would be to go through Carl Hayden, the chairman of the Rules Committee, and he could work something like that out with Carl. That wouldn't be any great trouble.

There was a doctor on board the plane on that trip. What was his name?

G: Gershom--? [Thompson]

R: That's it, I think. Johnson was having a kidney stone problem, and boy, it showed up all through that trip. The United States would have been better off if it had never taken place.

We landed at Stockholm and there were the usual welcoming speeches. Then Johnson went over and there was a bunch of school kids standing there, and in Sweden the school kids all wear uniforms. And he said something about, "How are you fellows?" or something like that, a little bit of banter, but with a translator, naturally. At that point, I was introduced to Werner Wiskari, who was a *New York Times* correspondent in Scandinavia and who was Finnish. He had been born in Michigan, where there are a tremendous number of Finns in the northern peninsula, and he spoke very fluent Swedish, and Norwegian, and Danish, and Icelandic, and the *New York Times* had assigned him to pick us up at Stockholm and cover the whole trip.

Well, let me get my chronology right, here. We went to that pavilion at the Fair, and there was a dinner and a speech . . . [reading chronology] No, it couldn't have been that night. You don't have me in this one; I was there. "Motor to Tullinge Airport"--that really was something. They had a demonstration of the--what do they call them? The Blue Angels or something like that, the Swedish acrobat team, and the main thing I remember is the air was just loaded with hornets that day. Zoom, and one of them--and he would start ducking, he didn't want to be dive-bombed by hornets. You weren't quite sure if it was a hornet or one of the Blue Angels.

I, of course, was not at the luncheon with the King and Queen of Sweden . . . Wait a second, I'm trying to find something very specific here.

Here we are, here we are. Most of the thing is just like your schedule, till you get him back into Stockholm where he was visited by that Swedish artist--ho, ho, ho, ho!--Uno Vallman, and he bought a painting--in fact, he bought more than one. Oh, it says, "Artist presents two others as gifts." That's right. He bought one painting and the artist gave him two. He returned to the suite--Betty Chapowicki, that was the nurse, yes.

Then I had managed to get out on the town a little bit. I was having a good time. I know quite a bit about the Swedes because for a while in Chicago I lived in the section known as Little Stockholm. And I got to the hotel I think around eight or nine, and I found a message to call him. He said, "Come on in, George," and I came on in. Those three paintings at the end of the room--oh, my God. What they looked like was, you know, some artists sometimes will deliberately try to paint pictures in somebody else's style, just as an exercise, and this looked like an artist who was imitating various styles of art--Cézanne, Corot, what have you. And he says, "Georgie, which one of those is the best?" And I had to say, "Well, Mr. [Vice] President, I don't think that any of them are exactly masterpieces, but I think that one of the waterfall in the center is probably the best," and it looked like an artist who was imitating the Cézanne style. You know Cézanne was that semicubist. He said, "Haw, haw, haw, Georgie, that shows how much you know about art. That (pointing to another picture) cost me three times as much as the other two." I said, "Mr. Vice President, how good a painting it is has nothing to do with how much it costs." And that kind of brought him up short. That had never occurred to him before. And he turned to Betty Chapowicki, I remember, he said, "What

do you think of it?" She said, "Well, I don't think any of them are any good. But George is probably right. That's not quite as bad as the others." It wasn't even calendar art. It wasn't that good, and it--oh Lord, I think that kind of put a little gloom over the whole occasion.

But then what had happened, they had managed to get some of the newspapers from the United States, and he said, "Who is this guy Werner Wiskari?" I said, "He's the *New York Times* correspondent." "What kind of a son of a bitch is he?" I said, "Well, I don't know, Mr. Vice President, I've gotten to know him. He seems all right. He's Finnish. Rather humorless, you know." Finns are humorless, to put it mildly. And he said, "Well, look, just look at what he wrote about me." And I looked and it described his coming into Stockholm. I couldn't see anything wrong with it. He said that he walked over to this crowd of school boys and said, "How are you guys?" and that's what enraged him so much, the "guys." In other words, he interpreted that as Wiskari saying, "This is a no-good, illiterate hillbilly, who talks about 'guys.'" I said, "For the love of God, Mr. Vice President. That's the way he'd talk. There was so much noise going on he couldn't hear you and he probably thought that's what you said." He was really in a rage. I spent that whole damn trip keeping the two of them as far apart as I could. And Betty Chapowicki said, "Well, Mr. Vice President, I agree it's not good, but you're making too much out of it. It's not that important." But he just decided that Werner Wiskari was in there to knife him, nothing else.

However, that business about the art worried me, and as soon as I got back to my room, I called the embassy and had them put me through--I think Finland was the next

stop, wasn't it?--had them put me through to the PAO [public affairs officer] in Finland. I said, "Look"--oh, by this time, incidentally, he had adopted this business of getting a painting in every country that he visited. And I said, "Look, be damn sure that he gets taken to a reputable art dealer when it comes time for him to look at some art, and don't let any fly-by-nights get in touch with him." I did that, by the way, for the rest of that trip; in fact, for the rest of the time I worked for him I always called ahead to the next country to be damn sure that he wasn't going to get that again. And boy, was I right.

But when we hit Finland, one of the papers had a great big story about the five-million-dollar art deal; that he had paid five million dollars for three paintings from this--whatever his name was--the largest art deal in the whole history of Scandinavia. I think he paid about two hundred or two-fifty or something, which was too much. But as you can see, little things like this had to be worked on.

By that time, I think that the kidney stone was really getting to him, because he was impossible on the Finnish trip. Let me follow the [chronology].

G: Okay.

R: Yes, we went to Helsinki, and the trouble started the moment we got in the hotel. Madam Seppälä had changed all the room arrangements that the Secret Service had made, and Johnson was just mad as all get-out. Oh Lord, they had to stop everything and get back to what the Secret Service had done originally.

(Interruption)

And so we started right off. It's a very peculiar hotel, by the way. The first two or three floors are offices and shops. You have to get up to about the third or fourth floor before

you start getting into rooms. So we finally got the room situation straightened out, but by that time he was mad as a bear. Then we went to the art gallery, and that was already taken care of--he didn't know it, I had taken care of that one--and from there to a dentist's office. Oh, he was having trouble with a tooth, too.

G: I have a note that he sang "Happy Birthday" to a seventy-year-old woman who was a vegetable vendor on the street.

R: He could have. I don't know. I don't remember it.

G: Of course that was the next day. [He] went to a farm?

R: Wait a minute, we are getting way ahead of ourselves here.

G: Oh, that was Oslo, excuse me.

R: Ah, yes. That evening as we got into the hotel, he had just closed the glass door when it got smashed with an egg, obviously thrown at him. And he didn't know about it. And two or three days later he again decided the goddamn, no-good, fucking press was lying, and I said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Mr. Vice President, but I'm going to have to tell you this: that egg went right past my chin, and they intended it for you."

Now the real problem, came with Rovaniemi. Whew, God. Back in the States, we had seen on the list that he was supposed to lay a wreath at this mass grave which represents the massacre at Rovaniemi. And we didn't know it at the time, but there is a very exact ritual, and if you know Finns, which I do, or for that matter, any Scandinavian, ritual is holy writ. You do things according to the way they are supposed to be done. A visiting dignitary is supposed to drive up to the mass grave, get out of the car and review a Finnish honor guard, then walk forward to the mass grave and lay the wreath, then step

back, bow his head for a minute of silent prayer, and then turn around, get in the car and drive away. And believe me, when Scandinavians say that's the way it is to be done, that's the way it's to be done.

Well, back in the States somebody had written something for him to say at Rovaniemi, and somebody had put it on [prompter] cards. And Sergeant [Paul] Glynn, who didn't know about it, had put the cards in his pocket. Now it didn't matter that Colonel [William?] Jackson had given him [LBJ] a last-minute warning, "You aren't supposed to say anything," and I had told him [too]. I think maybe that kidney stone was so bad that he really wasn't thinking at all. And of course, he did not understand Scandinavians. He and the Scandinavians did not get along at all. But he got out of the car and he went right past that honor guard, that honor guard standing there at rigid attention, you know, and I went up to the lieutenant and said, "*Herr Leutnant, sprechen sie Deutsch?*"--Finns do not speak English, but an awful lot of them speak German, and an awful lot of them speak Russian--and I said, "*Herr Leutnant, sprechen sie Deutsch?*" And he said, "*Ja wohl, mein Herr*." And I said, "*Machen sie dieser Männer losen* [Put these men at ease]." And thank God, he stood them at ease, or they'd still be standing there at rigid attention.

He [LBJ] just completely ignored them. Then he walked over and he laid the wreath on the grave, and he stepped back and gave his speech. I don't know why he didn't hear the mutter from the crowd. And then he started walking through the graves, shaking hands. *Walking over the graves*. And Lynda Bird had those Lynda Bird pencils. Did you ever see them? They were just ordinary pencils except they had stuck in the top

of them a rubber daisy that you could use as an eraser, and she started to walk up passing [out] those Lynda Bird pencils. My God, the crowd was--I'm surprised they didn't lynch him. Werner Wiskari came to me--the man was in a rage, you know. "What--what--does he know what he's doing? He's desecrating the most sacred spot in Finland!" Those American Finns are worse than the Finnish Finns, by the way.

Oh, thank God we got him out of there and got him into Rovaniemi, were we had an excellent lunch of saddle of reindeer, I can still recall, first time I ever had it. It was good.

Well, on the way back, Carl Rowan told him what he had done, and that really sent him into a deep depression. The whole party was supposed to go that night to some big timber company, which had a marvelous house on their timber land where they could--they had saunas and food and everything else. And he didn't go. He was just sulking at that point, you know, he had committed a very major boner. That was major. Me, I got the Finnish press in the cocktail lounge of the hotel and started pouring vodka down their throats and got them so goddamn drunk they couldn't type. I feared most the reaction of Werner Wiskari, and Werner--I've got to give that man credit. He wrote about it, but he put it in perspective; he had it in about the middle of his story, which is where it belonged.

And the next day, unfortunately, he [LBJ] had agreed to go out for a picnic on an island owned by the Seppäläs, near Turku. Boy, oh boy, oh boy. That's one he should have cancelled, for sure. Most of the staff stayed in Turku. We had a marvelous lunch at the old castle, and of course I was able to walk up and down the streets of Turku, where

they make the world's best fishing equipment. I had a marvelous time. But here he was in this boat, and the whole Finnish press had chartered a boat to go right alongside of them snapping pictures as he went out to this island. Oh, God, I was glad to get out of Finland alive. But Lord, that was major.

G: You went from there to Norway, is that right?

R: Yes, Norway, and again there was a bad one in Norway--Dr. Thompson is the one that I was trying to think of. It's funny, you don't have him listed in any of these things, and I went along with him.

Now comes the next little trip to Norway. A. W. Moursund, by the way, was on the trip and found some of his relatives in Norway.

He [LBJ] did a pretty good job with the Norwegian press at the University of Oslo. Where the hell was that dinner? There was a . . . Oh yes, the government dinner with the Ambassador and Mrs. [J. Graham] Parsons, Mrs. Johnson and Lynda Bird at the Akershus Fortress. Boy, that's where he was at his worst. The tables were in a gridiron pattern, and the entrance to the kitchen was right behind the head table. Now, have you ever been at a formal Scandinavian dinner? It's an experience. I knew about these from America. Everything is exact. If the dinner invitation says six o'clock, they mean six o'clock. They don't mean ten to six; they don't mean six-fifteen; they don't mean six-thirty. They mean six. And you'll stand in the reception room for half an hour, sipping at a cocktail. Then you're ushered into the tables and you're seated properly at the table: man, woman, man, woman, man, woman. And the skoaling starts, and skoaling is not just a "here's how" thing. You're supposed to lift your glass and look. First, you skoal

the lady to the left, and you're supposed to look into her eyes, and she's supposed to look into yours, and you're supposed to say, "Skoal." Then you drain the cup, you bring it up again, you say "Skoal", then you set it down, it gets refilled and you skoal the lady to the right. Then it's freelance skoaling, up and down the table. And all of this is precise. There is no variation from the ritual.

When everybody is thoroughly oiled--and it's a damn good icebreaker, after you've been looking into the eyes of every woman up and down the table, you may be a little groggy from all of the aquavit, but you know them pretty well. Then the signal is given, and the waiters or waitresses--it was waitresses in this particular case--they come into the room, and they shuffle their feet. That's part of the ritual, making a noise like that. And in this particular case they came out of the door behind the head table in twos and they split like that and came on down. One waiter or waitress to every four people.

G: Split into two columns.

R: Yes, they split into two columns, and then went around to the various points of the gridiron. And the head waiter then inspects the line, and, by God, West Point never turned out lines as good as they do at a Scandinavian formal dinner. And he gives a signal and they put the food down. And then he gives a signal and they march on back. And then when he gives them the signal once more to come out and take up the dishes, you can have a spoonful up about [like] this and all of a sudden the plate disappears. It's all done bing, bing, bing, bing, bing like that.

Well, [at] one point he beckoned to me. This might help [illustrate]. This is the room here. These are the tables and the gridiron. This is the passage behind the head

table. Here is the door. Here is Johnson. So he beckons to me, and I've got to come up here, and there was some idiotic thing he didn't like about his toast: should he say this or should he say that? Now, what he was asking required some complicated changes all the way through, and just at that point, the signal was given and out comes the waiters and the waitresses, and there is Reedy. They can't get by me. And I was trying to say, "Look," and he knew nothing--he had his back turned. I don't know if it was deliberate or not. I sometimes suspect that it was. And I penciled in something real quick and came on back this way. I'll never forget, one of the Norwegian dignitaries stops me and he said, "You tell your vice president that he can't bring manners like that into Scandinavia. Things are not done that way in Scandinavia." I said, "Well, I don't think he realized that the waiters and waitresses were there." But boy, you know, I'll never forget that. "You tell your vice president, he can't bring manners like that into this country. Things are not done that way in Scandinavia!" I was glad to get out of Norway.

G: Had the State Department briefed him on these procedures?

R: Oh, of course they did, but it didn't mean anything to him. He was more accustomed to Mexican manners. You're half an hour to an hour late to everything and nobody gives a damn. But the punctilio of Swedish--which is really rather good. Once you understand them, then you are quite free; you know what to do.

So I was damn glad to get out of there.

Now, Copenhagen--Copenhagen was fun. He really didn't have much to do there. Thank God, he left all of us alone.

Let's see, where are we now? He had a lunch, spoke at a student association. Meanwhile Kai Johansen, who was the Danish minister of information, said to me, "Look, George, there is not much doing tomorrow. Suppose I get a boat. We'll go out on the sound and do a little fishing. Of course, I'll bring along a little schnapps, a little Tuborg." Kai's idea of a little schnapps was a case of schnapps, and Kai's idea of a little Tuborg was about ten cases of Tuborg, and our fishing--I think Kai actually caught a fish, or somebody did. But mostly it was--every time I'd turn around there'd be Kai, "Skoal, George!" and he'd hand me a bottle of the schnapps and we'd skoal, chasing it with the Tuborg. By the time we got back to that landing I couldn't see Sweden--in fact, I'm not sure that I could see Denmark; I'm not even sure that I could see the pier. But I have gotten ahead of myself; there was a really amusing incident that should be told first. Thank God for the Danish sense of humor. They're the only people that have a real sense of humor.

Now the Secret Service always traveled ahead of him with a bed and a great big pillow. And the word got around Denmark that they were going to take the furniture out of his hotel room and put in American furniture, which got the Danes damn mad, because this particular hotel used furniture from a very famous designer. I've forgotten his name now, but it's short, four-letter Danish name. He's tops. Well, when it finally turned out that all it amounted to was that great big bed, the Danes started to laugh, and a marvelous cartoon when we landed--a sort of a spidery drawing of the front of the hotel with two long hairy legs sticking out of the window.

Denmark worked very well. As I said, Kai Johansen took the press and me out for some fishing. That night they were closing the Tivoli; it was the last night. Kai threw a big party for the press--I think the Johnsons were there too for a while--at which there was a hell of a lot more schnapps and vodka and what have you. My last clear memory is surging down the street with my arms around Danes. We were all singing in Danish. I don't know where I learned Danish. But I woke up in the hotel room the next day, my head clear as a bell, and we took off for Iceland.

That was the best part of the trip. There was just one funny thing about Iceland that's worth remembering. It was very standard routine, but he had Okamoto--was it Okamoto traveling with him, the photographer? I don't think it was, no. But he had a photographer traveling with him, one of those people who was a photographer, and they'd get a darkroom and they'd real quick set up some photographs of the trip, of the country in which they were at. And, oh boy, apparently word about this had reached Iceland. And so at the banquet that night, he pulled out this book which had some shots of Iceland, and the Vice President, and the Storting [Althing], and the prime minister, *et cetera*, [taken as recently as] up till about two or three in the afternoon. [He] made a great show of presenting it to--I guess it was the Prime Minister who was attending that bit, it was a [state?] banquet. And the Prime Minister with a smile accepted the book and then said, "And Mr. Vice President, we have prepared a book for you, in which the last photograph is one showing you where you're sitting right now." Talk about one-upmanship! That really got him.

Iceland was no runs, no hits, no errors.

G: What was the purpose of this Scandinavian trip?

R: Goodwill, entirely. There had been no trip of any kind, no attention had been paid to Scandinavia for years, and yet they had supported us in most of our international moves, and it was felt that something had to be done. And this goodwill trip--it was a hell of a good idea but they had the wrong man.

G: Finland and Norway were the two worst--

R: Yes, but he was not good anywhere. He was late to things, and you know, he was so accustomed to building his own time schedules that he did not--I tried to tell him. The State Department tried to tell him. Everybody tried to tell him, and he just simply did not understand the extreme punctilio of Scandinavian life.

Furthermore, there is something else involved too. Those are all middle-class countries, and I mean really middle-class. He was at his best when he was dealing with the bottom of the ladder, and I think most of his troubles in politics were with middle-class people. He didn't quite understand them. And he'd go over so big in India, go over big in Naples, lousy in Rome. Scandinavia--I wouldn't say the whole thing was a disaster, but the Rovaniemi thing was close to a disaster, and Sweden and Norway--Norway certainly was not good.

(Interruption)

G: --how Mrs. Johnson fared on this trip.

R: Well, that's my point. Mrs. Johnson did very well because she was curious about them as people, and everybody appreciates that. Here Mrs. Johnson would come along and she was really interested in them, interested in what they were like, interested in how they

lived. Everybody responds to that, anywhere in the world. Here he came, when he looked at people what he was always thinking was, "Now how can I use these people to achieve something? How can I look good in the United States by making a speech here?" It was that people, to him, were something to be used. Now, I don't mean used in a bad way necessarily. There were certain things about him--when it came to people at the very bottom of the ladder he was probably at his best, because he thought of them in terms of somebody he could do something for. Whereas when it came to the middle class, he didn't see them as people he could do something for; he saw them as people who might do something for him, but he didn't quite know what.

G: Did the trip receive criticism in the press back home?

R: No. No, because there is remarkably little attention paid in the United States to the Scandinavian countries, except maybe in Minnesota, or--there used to be a lot of Scandinavians in Chicago. And it just didn't get much play in the United States. Werner Wiskari, of course, had very good stories in the *New York Times*, but he was leaning over backwards not to be as critical as he felt. Oh God, he was an enraged man.

For Johnson, I'd say the trip did very little. For the United States, I think it was--well, if you balance everything, the mere fact that a vice president visited what they usually like to [call] the Nordic bloc, because they aren't all Scandinavians. The Finns aren't Scandinavians; the Danes aren't Scandinavian. I suppose the mere fact that the United States did send a vice president there had some positive effect. Although I think what he did at Rovaniemi was not good.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XXII

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