

INTERVIEW XXIII

DATE: August 28, 1988

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Reedy's residence at Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

R: Johnson had one difficulty with the committee staff on the Preparedness Subcommittee, and that is the entire staff with the exception of me was from the Securities and Exchange Commission. It was headed by Don Cook. Oh, you had Dave Ginsburg, Gerry Siegel, people like that, and they were all accustomed to the operations of an agency which essentially is a policing agency. In other words, if the Securities and Exchange Commission sends you a questionnaire you answer it as a businessman. You either answer it or you're out of business pretty quick. So therefore when they approached many problems, they had a tendency--or they didn't have a tendency, but the political problems involved were alien to them, and quite often they'd get into some terribly hot water. I don't recall this particular one--that is, this business about the airframe manufacturers--but I can imagine the kind of questionnaire. It was the kind of questionnaire that the SEC will order. If the SEC orders it, okay, you bring on extra accountants. I'm pretty sure that Johnson just forgot the whole thing, which was the sensible thing to do.

G: Did you have any contact with Johnson's Preparedness Subcommittee work before you joined the staff?

Reedy -- XXIII -- 2

R: Oh, sure. It's rather strange. I've got to recapitulate the background here. One night Dave Broder, the Washington reporter for the *Dallas News*--I think you have this in another place, but to give some foundation to this I think I'd better repeat it--Dave Broder, who was a reporter for the *Dallas News*, invited me to a cocktail party after Johnson was elected to the Senate--a party which ostensibly was given by Dave; I suspect that Johnson gave it himself using Dave as the host. That's where I first met Johnson. I learned later, however, that Dave had been with me on a trip, a bus trip taken by the House Agriculture Committee up and down the country, and when Johnson had asked him for an imaginative reporter Dave had recommended me.

I got to know Johnson reasonably well, and by that time the committee work was so heavy that the United Press had committees divided up. My committees were the Armed Services Committee, the Joint Atomic Energy Committee, which is where I met Ruth by the way, and the Interstate Commerce Committee. One day I stumbled across this story--I thought I'd stumbled across it; I learned later it was put in my way--about Johnson going to head a committee to look into the Korean War, not the war effort but various things the government was doing to prepare people for the war, and that became my biggest story. I became very intimately involved with it, although frankly, for some reason, I did not get to know any of the committee staff members. At that particular point Buz [Horace Busby] was still doing the kind of work that I was really taken on to do, mostly rewriting the reports so they'd come out in English and putting into it a certain degree of political expertise.

Rather interesting, there was one period in which I called Johnson one day and asked for him, and Sarah Wade, who was at the switchboard in his office, said he wasn't

Reedy -- XXIII -- 3

there, and, "By the way, are you George Reedy?" and I said yes. "Of the United Press?" I said yes. "Well, the Senator told me that if you called to give you this number," and that was the number at Bethesda Naval Hospital. He had a great deal of difficulty with his bronchial tubes in those days, and he had to check in to get them swabbed out every once in a while. That was the conversation where he made some remark about, "You ought to come over and work for me," and I said, "Well, make me an offer," and a couple of days later I was working for him.

My last job for the United Press was to check Douglas MacArthur into the Hotel Statler, and within two or three weeks I was the whole staff for the committee investigation of MacArthur. He went to [Richard] Russell--you remember the Senate put Foreign Relations and the Armed Services Committee together, and they appointed Russell as chairman because they figured he was the only man with enough ability to handle it. Johnson went to him and said Russell had an excellent staff, but not what was needed for this investigation. He practically turned me over to Russell. I did a lot more work for Russell than I did for Johnson for that whole period.

G: Was the Preparedness Subcommittee seen as a vehicle for boosting LBJ's visibility, as the Truman watchdog committee had done for Truman?

R: I don't know. Unquestionably it was seen as one to at least boost his influence in the Senate, to have an important committee like that. For a freshman senator, it's quite a coup. I don't know if he was thinking in terms of national visibility. It's very difficult to tell about that with a man like LBJ, because he not only would have denied it, he would have denied it convincingly no matter how he felt about it. But there's no doubt that what

Reedy -- XXIII -- 4

it did was to give him a much higher degree of influence in the Senate. Also it did something else: it brought him to the attention of Harry Truman.

LBJ told me this story, that the whole committee went down to the White House to see Truman, not only because he was president but because of Truman's war investigating committee, which, by the way, I covered before the army got me. Truman said, "Lyndon, I want you to stay behind after the rest leave. I want to talk to you for a moment." Then Truman said, "Lyndon, you're going to be a success or a failure, according to your relationship with the ranking Republican. You're pretty lucky. You've got Styles Bridges as the ranking Republican. You're going to watch Styles. He'll be eyeing you very carefully for a couple of weeks. He wants to find out how you're going to play the game. He really doesn't care how you're going to play it. If you deal off the bottom, he'll deal off the bottom. If you're going to deal out of the middle, he'll deal out of the middle. But if you deal off the top, he'll deal off the top. Just play it straight with Bridges and you won't have any trouble." That turned out to be correct. A rather close relationship developed between Johnson and Styles Bridges, as a result. But you see, it brought him to Truman's attention.

And then the early committee reports were really rather remarkable. They were reports that commanded huge headlines, but they weren't the kind of "rip 'em to pieces," pillory-everybody kind of report you usually expect out of a congressional investigating committee. They were rather sober, rather substantial. The great big one, of course, was the report on tin. That was a very important one.

G: Do you want to elaborate on that?

Reedy -- XXIII -- 5

R: One of the first things the committee tackled was the question of strategic metals and materials, because the Korean War had done some rather difficult things for us. For one thing, it had cut off many of our supplies of manganese. Most of the world's richest manganese is in North Korea, you know, north of the parallel. And also what had happened was that the international tin cartel--and it was a cartel in those days--had taken advantage of it to raise the prices of tin to an ungodly amount. Now it's amazing how vital tin is. You can't fight a war without tin. Most Americans think of tin as something that goes into a tin can, which, by the way, it doesn't. I don't think there's any tin in tin cans. Everybody has a picture of a bunch of goats, you know, going around the yard eating tin cans. Well, tin is one of the most vital of all materials. You can't really build good ships without tin. The thing is, it resists corrosion and all sorts of things. And most of your tin comes from Malaysia and is controlled by British sources, and Dutch.

So the committee made a very thorough investigation and put out a report which had quite an impact. For one thing, it led to the redevelopment of Bolivian tin. Bolivian tin is of very low quality, low grade tin, which requires a special type of smelter to smelt. And they reactivated the one at Texas City, Texas, which of course gave Johnson some credit with his fellow Texans, but nevertheless, there was no place else to put it. It was there. All they had to do was take it out of mothballs. There wasn't any other smelter [that] could handle that Bolivian tin. They did various other things. The report had a terrific impact. What it did also--it gave the committee a reputation of being solid. That was terribly important, the fact that it was solid.

We later came through with another report on tungsten. I had joined the committee by then; the tin report was before I had joined the committee staff. But the

Reedy -- XXIII -- 6

next one was a report on tungsten, which is also fascinating because tungsten is absolutely vital to the antitank program of the army, and what had happened was that the stockpilers were not informed of the fact that the army needed huge stockpiles of tungsten for antitank shells. Our report characterizes sort of a game of blind man's bluff, that the people who knew what they needed didn't tell the people who knew how to get it. But there were a series of reports like that, in which nobody was pilloried. There wasn't any question of roasting anybody or anything like that, but they still made superb headlines. They did well.

G: In the tin investigation did you have any natural adversaries, either the producers themselves or the--?

R: No, because the producers are foreign. There's no tin in the United States. Most of the world's supplies of tin are controlled either by British interests, Dutch interests, or in the case of Bolivia, Victor Paz and Estenssoro Paz, the publishers of *La Prensa* down in Buenos Aires [Argentina], which is supposed to be one of the world's greatest newspapers. [Victor Paz Estenssoro was the president of Bolivia, but was not involved in *La Prensa*. Ezequiel P. Paz and his nephew, Alberto Gainza Paz, were the owners and editors at *La Prensa* in the 1940s and 1950s.] They had basically made a fortune out of tin, and they used their money to establish a prize-winning newspaper. But no, we didn't have any natural adversaries, that is, in the United States, which, of course, I don't think was the reason that tin was selected. Tin was selected because it was one of the most difficult problems we had. But it did help somewhat. It allowed us to have a fairly substantial report without taking somebody up and hanging them to twist slowly in the wind.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 7

G: There had been a failure to stockpile tin, as I understand.

R: Yes, a very bad failure. The committee report had quite an impact, by the way, because the price of tin started to fall, almost immediately, and it eventually got down to, shall we say, reasonable levels. That is, reasonable levels with a major war going on, which Korea was.

G: Do you think that the committee's work did anything to advance the future stockpiling of strategic metals?

R: It's hard to tell. There's no doubt in my mind that it alerted executive officials to the fact that they had to be a lot sharper about it. That wasn't quite so much the case with tin as it was with the tungsten report, because [with] tungsten there were very few alternate sources that we could turn to. There's something they produce in Colorado--I've forgotten the name of it now--which is not as good as tungsten but forms something of the same purpose. You know tungsten is very, very hard--it's used as an alloy. Pure tungsten is not used. What they do, they use it with a steel alloy in order to get those antitank shells which will have a tungsten steel covering in the front and then behind it a soft lead mass. The tungsten steel nicks the tank, and then the lead mass goes right through at the point of the nick. I think that one might say that after that, the people in charge of stockpiling realized they had to be a lot more careful and they really had to start raising hell with the other executive agencies and find out what they really needed.

G: Was there a problem with the Munitions Board and the army not communicating with regard to stockpiling?

R: Right. The stockpiling, at that particular point, overall was under the General Services Administration. I don't know if the Munitions Board was a part of that administration or

Reedy -- XXIII -- 8

not, but what was happening on this was that it never occurred to anybody in the army to alert the General Services Administration to this need for tungsten. Now the tin thing, that's a little bit different. Tin supplies would have seemed adequate, normally. But the trouble was it never occurred to anybody that while there were adequate supplies of tin in the world, and while we had no problem getting access to those supplies, they still had to be carried over a long, over-water route, clear across the Pacific, in short. This was bound to give people that had monopoly control--it was bound to present them with a temptation they couldn't resist. And the British and Dutch interests had monopoly control at that point. They could do anything they wanted with it.

G: Now let me ask you to describe the work of the Munitions Board.

R: I do not know about the Munitions Board; I know about the GSA. One of its duties was to handle the stockpiles of strategic, critical minerals, and whether that was done through something called the Munitions Board I just don't know.

G: We've talked about tin and tungsten. Let me ask you to focus on nickel.

R: I don't remember that we did much about it. It seems to me that I can recall somebody that was watching it, but I don't think we ever really produced a report.

G: It was a situation where the Canadians had, essentially, a monopoly.

R: Pretty much, up in Sudbury, Ontario. There's an enormous complex up there. I've seen it a number of times. But I don't think we had any problems with nickel. The major problems were with tungsten, manganese, tin. That's about it.

G: One of the things that the subcommittee did was--

R: Oh, mercury.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 9

G: --stop the sale of the government-owned synthetic rubber plant in Akron, Ohio. Do you remember that?

R: Right. Yes. I don't think we actually ever produced a report on rubber. I know that we got a draft of a report, which may have been produced as a report, but I doubt it, because the draft simply was not producible as a report. We had a rubber expert on the committee, I've forgotten his name now, and he really did know an awful lot about rubber; he was out of the GSA. But to be very frank about it he had difficulty in writing lucid English. Now this is one of the troubles one gets out of experts: they can only talk to other experts. He did produce a draft report which was to me absolutely baffling. I couldn't make sense out of it and neither could Johnson, because he [the expert] was assuming a level of knowledge of the technicalities of synthetic rubber that nobody else really had. I happened to know a little bit about it, by the way, for the simple reason that I covered the old Truman Committee before Uncle Sam decided he had better uses for me, and the Truman Committee made quite an investigation into synthetic rubber. That was before we actually got into the war. I remember covering those hearings and learning quite a bit about how it was made and that sort of thing. But I don't believe we got into rubber very deeply, because we could never get a satisfactory report. But the committee did take individual actions, like that business in Akron.

G: There was also the question of alcohol plants in Omaha and Kansas City.

R: That was not nearly as important. The alcohol is needed for purposes other than alcohol. I mean by that it goes into synthetic rubber, it goes into quite a few things. And there were not very many plants producing alcohol in the volume that was necessary for the war effort. We did put out a report on it. We just raised a little bit of hell, and it [the

Reedy -- XXIII -- 10

plant] was not sold. I wouldn't regard that as being particularly significant in the development of the committee. That was one of the off things.

G: The committee was critical of the administration for failing to stockpile wool.

R: Oh . . . critical, but that wasn't as essential. It was too bad that more wool hadn't been stockpiled but there were alternative things you could do; synthetic fibers have been very well developed. So he didn't make too much of a point of it; it would have been ridiculous. It wasn't like tin; it wasn't like tungsten. It wasn't like rubber, for that matter, where there were just no alternatives.

G: To what extent was the fact that a lot of the equipment that was used in Korea at the outset of the war did not seem effective in stopping Soviet-made tanks--?

R: That was one of the reasons for the flap on tungsten. We had some excellent antitank weapons, but did not have sufficient tungsten to produce the antitank shell. The antitank shell absolutely has to have a hardening thing. I wish I could think of that stuff in Colorado that they use as something of a substitute. But you get into a very peculiar problem when you start talking about the failure to stop the North Koreans in Korea, and that is, to what extent was our failure a lack of materials, a lack of weapons, and to what extent was it strategic, to what extent was it tactical? And certainly this committee was in no position to really start evaluating battle tactics. There wasn't a single general on the committee. I think I had gone as high as anybody; I was a captain in the air force. So we were a little bit leery about going into things like that. It would lead us into very tricky fields that a congressional committee really had no business being in. It could have converted us into another Committee on the Conduct of the War, which--I don't know if it's still true, but when I was around the Senate, all you had to do to send shivers up and

Reedy -- XXIII -- 11

down the spines of people was to recall the Committee on the Conduct of the War. Now that was back in 1863, and it's still remembered in Congress as something you shouldn't do.

G: Was the fitness of the occupation troops in Japan an appropriate subject for the committee?

R: No, not really. We had no way of gauging it. In fact, one of the troubles that we got into at one point was a report--I had some qualms about it when it was written--a report about the morale of Marine Corps recruits out on the West Coast . . . that Marine Corps barracks, what is it, San Diego? That got us into a fair amount of trouble. The marines raised hell about it. They said what we were doing was taking too seriously the natural griping that soldiers and marines always do. But when you get into questions of fitness, that's pretty difficult, because, you know, what's "fit?" You can go into matters of equipment. Even there you have some problems. But is the equipment at least the latest? Is the equipment at least the highest technology available? Is the equipment of a sort people can use? When you say, "Are troops fit?"--I certainly wouldn't have gone into that one.

G: Did Lyndon Johnson personally have a view about how well equipped we were to fight the Korean War?

R: Yes. He would have thought that we were poorly equipped, and in many respects we were. Most of our equipment at that particular point--you know, generals are always fighting the last war, and most of our equipment at that point was not only World War II in terms of vintage, but World War II in terms of psychology. Our equipment was really designed to fight the Germans, to fight the Italians, to fight the Japanese. Well, Korea

Reedy -- XXIII -- 12

was a totally different thing. In Korea, our great big heavy bombers didn't have the same impact that they would have in Europe, or they would have in Tokyo, or Osaka, or Kawasaki. Korea was a highly mountainous nation. I've been there since then and, oh boy, thank God I didn't have to fight in that kind of a terrain. Almost all of our battles in World War II had been in fairly flat, level plains, or at least on beaches or places like that. And quite a few things like our antitank program hadn't gone fast enough. And I think Johnson would have had that as a private opinion, and would exercise that private opinion, of course, in votes and in talking to generals but I don't think he would ever have put that out as a public statement. Senators really shouldn't do things like that; they are not sufficiently authoritative.

G: Manpower was an area that the committee became involved with.

R: Right. We became involved in it, and--there's a very unfortunate factor in Korea. The thing came up so suddenly that we didn't have any real way of raising an army, and most of the Korean War was fought with people who had fought World War II, which is kind of a form of double jeopardy. If you take a look at it you'll find that most of the troops were National Guard troops that were hauled in, reserve units--most of the air force were reserve units. I think I would have been called myself if I hadn't been working on the committee staff. And that did contribute, to some extent, to poor morale. To be fighting a war and to figure, "Well, my God, there's a new generation that's come along. Let them see what it's like," when you have to go back and do the same old thing again. I think that caused some problems. And then of course, I think that MacArthur's rather massive strategic error had really taken the heart out of a lot of the troops. You know, when he started going up north--

Reedy -- XXIII -- 13

G: Task Fort Smith--or, no, later, after the Inchon--

R: Yes. The initial thing was brilliant, his initial landing, but the follow-up was not. Our troops proceeded up the valleys, leaving the North Koreans able to come in behind us and shoot down at us and we had to shoot up. And I saw enough of the South Korean troops when I was in Korea, many years later, to realize those babies are tough. Just as soldiers, they're probably the world's best soldiers.

There was some stability after--who was the general who came in?

G: [Matthew B.] Ridgway?

R: Ridgway, yes. I think there was some stability then. Ridgway was not as spectacular as MacArthur but he was a more solid commander. MacArthur relied too much on brilliance.

G: So first there was the question of the sequence of making manpower available, drafting, calling up older veterans rather than--was this primarily because of their experience that they--?

R: Yes. We had to have something fast. Those North Korean troops were good. You couldn't call in a bunch of boy scouts against them. You had to have some battle-seasoned veterans. Of course, the draft calls went up right away. It's rather interesting if you check: for the year and a half before we actually got into Korea, I don't think more than four or five men were drafted in the whole United States, [not] more than a couple of hundred at the most. All of the sudden, Korea, [and] it shoots way up. We started drafting 20, 30, 40,000 a month, but you'll find if you check the records that not many of those actually got into combat. Korea was fought mostly with veterans of World War II.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 14

- G: The committee also wanted to make sure that those in uniform served at the most useful level--in combat where they could, rather than what Lyndon Johnson referred to as the desk-bound chair corps.
- R: That's one of those very appealing phrases. When you actually get down to what's needed, though, you've got to have an awful lot of armchair people to fight a war today. It's rather interesting; I remember on one occasion the committee did a report contrasting the amount of firepower in a Soviet division and the amount of firepower in the American division, and it made us look absolutely ridiculous. Our division at that point, if I remember correctly, was about 20,000 men. The Soviet division was something like 5,000 or 6,000, but yet the firepower was equal. And an American destroyer--I've forgotten the figures now; you can go back and check them if you want, because it's in the committee report. But the Soviet destroyer seemed to have about one quarter the number of men, with the same firepower. I'll never forget that damned report. It was done by a young committee staff member, and all he really did was to take a lot of figures out of some publications and paste them up so they'd look like a report, and then put headings on them, and that's what I had to handle. I wasn't going to rewrite just out of that, so I started looking into it. I discovered all sorts of strange things. If you recognize the fact that in the United States we put into our division all sorts of services that the Soviets handle through other means, you suddenly discover that they're getting no more firepower than we are, per man. It's just [that] they're organized differently. For instance, when the Soviets say "a division," what they mean is men with rifles and their immediate combat commanders. Everything else is in something else. For instance, the army must establish a straggler's line at all points. The NKVD [Narodny Kommisariat

Reedy -- XXIII -- 15

Vnutrennikh Del-People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, former Soviet Union under Stalin] does that for the Soviet Union. The NKVD is organized to some extent as a military organization. All the services of supply are not in the division, not one of them, none of the trucks or anything else. So if you just look at the raw figures you say to yourself, "Hey, wait a minute. We must have all kinds of chair-bound men in the American division, when the Soviets get about as much firepower with about a third." But when you start looking at the fact that the Soviets are doing the same thing we are, that's when you suddenly discover how many chair-bound people you have got to have. I've forgotten what the reasons were in the destroyer, but it was similar. They had all kinds of people on that destroyer actually doing things. We put them in uniform and make them part of the ship's personnel. The Soviets had put them in a different uniform and say they were a different service. So that business about chair-bound people, there's a bit of demagoguery, and I think Johnson believed it, but I don't. I had to do that report.

G: Were there lower physical standards of acceptability than there had been in World War II?

R: I don't know. I don't remember we ever looked into that. The standards got pretty low in World War II. The famous gag was that one doctor would look in one ear and another doctor would look in another ear, and if their eyes didn't meet you were 1-A.

I was at one post during World War II where we had four or five men who were actually cripples. It was incredible. Those men could just get around, and the army took them into the hospital, performed surgery on them, got them all fixed up and then sent them back to civilian life. It was good for those men; they really got some very good free

Reedy -- XXIII -- 16

surgery. But I can't believe any standards would be lower than the standards that prevailed in World War II.

G: Another criticism was that the armed services were too top-heavy, that there were too many admirals and generals.

R: Well, again, I think there may have been a lot of people that believed that, but that is because we in the United States put in uniform many people that are doing things, [while] the same things are being done in other countries but they're not being done by people in uniform. I think that's all there is to it. I know the criticisms were there and I probably believed them myself at that point. But one of the things that happened to me is [that] going over those committee reports, I myself was talked out of a lot of things I had believed before, and that was one of them.

G: Another consideration was how the welfare of the troops that were activated--there was an investigation at Lackland [Air Force Base in San Antonio], which--let me ask you to describe that.

R: Actually that was part of a series of investigations. That was one of the few investigations where we used investigators that were not actually members of the Securities and Exchange Commission staff, and we looked at about twelve bases altogether, of which Lackland was one. I think Lackland was first; that's what called it to Johnson's attention. A fellow named Paul Popple--you must have him in the files--Paul did all of those reports and they were excellent. Paul was a very good worker. The main problem was, really, the conditions around the posts where these men were being trained, because the civilian population was taking unmerciful advantage of them. They were charging them fantastic rentals for housing, that is, for the men who had families. One

Reedy -- XXIII -- 17

place that I can remember that was really rather colorful [was] where somebody had taken an old chicken coop and fixed it around as an apartment. It wasn't much of an apartment, it was still pretty much of a chicken coop. Another guy had built a house out of whiskey bottles just as a sort of stunt, and he rented that out at some really exorbitant rate. What the army itself was doing was not bad except that it was not exercising enough strength with the civilian community, which was rather merciless. That was one of the more solid reports that the committee put out. By the way, all the reports of the committee were not as solid as those we've been talking about up until now.

G: How so?

R: Well, this guns and butter thing. Oh, brother, I'll never forget that one; the Pentagon officials began to holler like a stuck pig. And you had some very, very savvy journalists in Washington that really understood economics, Bart Rowan for instance. Now this particular report involved a deal with *Newsweek*, that if *Newsweek* had an exclusive, Johnson would get a cover. That's how the cover came about. That was a deal that was negotiated while I was out of town, or I would have screamed. That's the most stupid thing you can do, to negotiate a deal just to get something favorable. [It] got *Time* magazine mad as all get-out at us. Got the whole press mad as all get-out, because they knew that a cover had to be prepared at least a week in advance, and the report was released on a Saturday, too late for *Time*, which is all *Newsweek* cared about. I came back and discovered that deal had been made and I took a quick look, and when you first looked at it, it looked pretty solid. I was not sufficiently sophisticated in those days, or I would have raised more hell and tried somehow to stop that report before it even got going, because this was the trouble with it: it proved very conclusively that we had not

Reedy -- XXIII -- 18

turned out as much as we should have turned out within the time limit. We *were* having some very grave difficulties with getting our stuff out, but the butter part of it was absolutely ridiculous.

The criticisms of the report began to mount, and finally I set up a session with Don Cook and the committee staff, and some of the reporters, like Bart Rowan, and a few around there. Don thought he could handle this easily. They cut him to pieces. They challenged him to name one instance, just one, in which a civilian priority had interfered with the production of any military instrument, and he could not do it. Nor could any one of the other members of the staff. The guns part of it everybody agreed with, but the butter part made us look silly.

I think, well, probably overall, to have a cover in a magazine like *Newsweek* of course gave Johnson some standing. But we looked so silly to the more sophisticated people that I think that was a bad mistake. And again, I protested when I discovered the deal. I do not think you ever make anything in the field of public relations by making a deal to give somebody an exclusive. There was an old Greek saying that every time you do somebody a favor you make nineteen enemies and one ingrate. That's what I think we got out of that.

That was not solid and I don't think that Marine Corps report was solid either.

G: Tell me about the Marine Corps report.

R: It's only dimly in my memory now. A couple of investigators had been out there [to] San Diego, and they ran into a bunch of marines that squawked about what was happening on the base. So they wrote a report about how morale is going to hell in the training bases of the Marine Corps. Well, I've been in the army, and by God, you gripe from morning to

Reedy -- XXIII -- 19

night. If the soldiers stop griping then the commanders get worried. Griping is one of the most normal ways of life. I want to admit something: I did not protest that one, because it just hadn't occurred to me. The report looked pretty solid. But when the Marine Corps started to protest, it became apparent pretty quickly that we had sent somebody who had never been in an army or military unit and didn't realize how those things happen. I don't think those reports were very good. Later on we got an investigator named Downey Rice, whom we had gotten off the Kefauver committee--

(Tape 1 of 1, side 1)

G: You were talking about Downey Rice when we--

R: We brought Downey on and--the difficulty is that Downey was looking for cops and robbers. That's not what we were after.

G: What do you mean by cops and robbers?

R: Well, he was looking for somebody you could indict for something, and Downey jumped awfully quick at things, without really taking a look at them. For instance, at that point we were building that big base in Greenland, which is very key to the whole American defense system, and Downey and his assistant, whose name I've forgotten now, immediately came to the conclusion that there was something crazy about spending these hundreds of millions of dollars on what was essentially an iceberg. They started to investigate it and made us look rather ridiculous. They didn't understand that the base was essential because it was the shortest route to the Soviet Union if you went over the pole. That had never occurred to them, to go over the pole for a thing like that. And eventually--you must realize, when Johnson became majority leader he had very little time to devote to the Preparedness Committee after that. In fact, the only thing it did that

Reedy -- XXIII -- 20

I know for sure was to handle the space hearings at a later point. When that happened Downey got himself a job with the Chicago Crime Commission, and that was that.

G: To what extent was Johnson interested in publicity?

R: He was interested in publicity, but--

G: I mean in connection with the Preparedness Subcommittee.

R: Well, he was interested in publicity. He wanted it to be the right kind of publicity. But Johnson was always so cautious, super cautious. On the other hand there were times when he'd go ahead and do something without really thinking it through, like that cover on *Newsweek*, which gave him a lot of publicity all right, but also, I think, to many people it called his credibility into question, that he and the committee would have signed that report of the guns and butter thing, which really had no backing. All that he really knew was that the production had fallen behind schedules. But there was no way in the world that he could prove that it was because we were pouring too much into the civilian economy. I was really embarrassed that day when--I think it was Bart Rowan [who] challenged Don Cook on pointing out some instances where production had fallen behind because the Defense Department had not had sufficient materials or resources allocated to it. Don couldn't name any.

G: It's said that he made a point of securing consensus on the committee reports.

R: Always.

G: Describe that process.

R: Well, there's not too much to say about it. The reports were always written in such a way as to make the points that were to be made, but not to cause offense.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 21

This did not result in a report, but on one occasion we started an investigation of gambling and prostitution around army bases, and one of them that was most notorious was Biloxi, Mississippi. Senator Stennis was coming up for election that year and I remember John Stennis coming to me and saying, "George, I don't want to interfere with this in any way. Whatever's down there ought to be investigated and something ought to be done about it. But please, when you're working this report, will you give me the best break you can?" I said, "I sure will, Senator."

Well, it didn't come to a report. Actually, the heat we put on the Defense Department was enough that they started to police, which they could do. They can send MPs [Military Police] through a town and really take care of questions like that.

But generally speaking, Johnson, in terms of language--not in terms of substance, but in terms of language--would go quite far in order to get unanimous committee reports, which was one of the reasons that it was so effective.

G: What was the process for doing so? Would staff members go to the staff members of senators, or would it be worked out in committee session?

R: No. What would happen is that the preparation of the committee report would go through a number of hands. The committee staff would prepare a report; Don Cook would approve or disapprove. It would go to me. I would work it over, keeping in mind Johnson's desire to have as unanimous a report as he can, and send it on back. Quite often I'd have to negotiate with the committee staff. Then once we had something we could agree on, Johnson would take it up personally with the senators.

It was kind of funny. Senator [Leverett] Saltonstall would always insist on a change. And he once told us that even though the change was innocuous--and almost

Reedy -- XXIII -- 22

always it was innocuous--he wanted to feel that he had something to do with the writing of a report that he was going to sign, even if it was only two words. But Johnson himself would handle the question of getting unanimous support.

G: In terms of Johnson's role in hearings--let's say if you had a hearing on something--how much preparation did he do?

R: Oh, a tremendous amount of preparation. He didn't have many hearings, though. It wasn't that kind of committee. In fact, most of the hearings I can remember involved Downey Rice; that is, the public hearings. We did have some hearings that were closed sessions. For example, as a follow-up to that guns-and-butter report, one of the things we were looking into was the question of the B-52, which was way behind schedule. We called a session on that, and--who was secretary of the air force then? Was it [Thomas K.] Finletter? I think it was. It doesn't matter. But it turned out that what had happened was that there had been a deliberate slowdown on the B-52 because they were waiting to see whether a successful hydrogen bomb could be developed. If so, the B-52 was essential for carrying the hydrogen bomb, but they didn't want to really go ahead with production until they were sure they had a reason for it. The B-47, I think it was, was the standard bomber at that point, and of course it could handle atom bombs, as could the B-29s, but the hydrogen bomb it couldn't. But I can still remember that hearing, where it was super-duper top secret and all that kind of thing. But those were about the only hearings we had. We had very few hearings.

(Interruption)

G: In the case of rubber, the committee recommended enforcing the cutting off of shipments of rubber to China by friendly nations. Do you recall that?

Reedy -- XXIII -- 23

R: No, I don't recall that at all. I know that that was not in a report. It may have been an individual action.

G: You've talked about tin. Let's talk about some other industries, like the watch-making industries in New England.

R: There wasn't any particular problem there.

G: I think the interest was preserving a domestic industry that could be used for making instruments for aircraft, and things of that nature.

R: I don't recall our getting into it. I do recall quite a controversy over the Waltham factory up in New England, which was about the only American-made watch, and it was having a great deal of trouble competing with cheap Swiss imports. And of course about that time a number of nations besides Switzerland were beginning to get into the watch-making business--Denmark, for instance. I think Germany started to make watches. The Japanese weren't at that point, but they were starting to get into it. And I can recall quite a bit of controversy in Congress itself, over legislation to help the Waltham people, and I can recall the head of the union representing the Waltham employees coming before some other committee--this was before I went to work on the Preparedness Committee--asking for help. But I don't recall the Preparedness Committee getting into it at all.

You have to remember one thing, though: my office was actually in the Capitol. I had an office, with Dorothy Nichols as my secretary. And the committee staff was down in the SEC building. I would go down there occasionally, and occasionally individuals would drop into my office. But my orientation was more toward the Senate

Reedy -- XXIII -- 24

than it was towards the committee staff. The rest of the committee staff was oriented more toward the SEC.

G: Do you recall the investigation of the Allison division of General Motors?

R: No, I don't remember that at all.

G: This was over the aircraft engines.

R: I don't remember that at all, although I know quite a bit about Allison's because--well, during the war we had Pratt & Whitney's, but I don't remember any investigation.

G: Okay.

R: I was concerned that the committee staff was very blithely taking on all kinds of investigations for which they had neither the jurisdiction nor the resources. I remember this one now; by God, that questionnaire would have cost every one of the people who handled it a couple of million bucks. And for what?

G: Was this largely Don Cook's doing that led the committee to--?

R: I don't think so. I think he would give some approval to it, but by and large I think it was more the investigating staff of the SEC, people like Dave Ginsburg and that crew.

I'll never forget Leverett Saltonstall; he was absolutely right. Leverett Saltonstall had served on some kind of a committee. It may have been Finance; I don't know. But it had taken a look in questions of excess profits, and Saltonstall said he was horrified by the very thought, that you got into some of the most incredible, intricate questions, because what you were involved in, really, was bookkeeping, and bookkeeping is not an exact science.

[Reading] "Should we go behind the plans--?" Damn good memo. I'm proud of it. That was a continuing concern of mine, though.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 25

G: This was with regard to the profits.

R: The profits, yes.

G: It's a memo from you to LBJ dated October 5, 1955.

R: That one I did specifically for Senator Stennis. He was going to make a speech.

G: One of the items referred to here is a committee investigation disclosing that the army was shipping inductees to Hawaii for basic training and then back to the United States.

R: That *was* rather ridiculous. They did it because during World War II a jungle training camp was established in Hawaii, and the training facilities really were rather good. But Korea is not a jungle. The problem in Korea is you are fighting in the mountains; you are not fighting in the jungle. It was silly to ship people all the way to Hawaii and then ship them back. I think they just did it. You know, it's rather interesting how if something is done, not only in the military, but in government generally, and the need for doing that thing disappears, the thing itself will continue unless someone really goes in to put a stop to it.

I have a vivid memory of when we went overseas. I was responsible for signing out all of the maps for my outfit. Have I told you that story? And we weren't quite sure where we were going so I had to sign out for an awful lot of maps at Seattle, and I remember that I had to sign my name on twelve separate documents for each set of maps. You must remember that we had fifty or a hundred sets. I was just sitting there with my teeth clenched, getting writer's cramp more and more, afraid to even open my mouth and ask, "What in the hell is this all about?" because it would take up too much energy. God, I'll never forget signing all those papers. When I had finished I was standing there with my wrist feeling as though somebody had been pounding it with a hammer. And I finally

Reedy -- XXIII -- 26

said, "Look, what do you do with all these copies I have signed?" And they said, "Well, Lieutenant, one copy, the basic copy, goes to the army map store in St. Louis,"--we were still the Army Air Force. "The second copy goes to the Headquarters, 2d Air Force," which was the training command. "The third copy is for your 201 file." Every officer carries a 201 file. "And the fourth copy goes ahead to 20th Air Force so they'll know what you've got." I said, "Okay. How about the other eight?" They said, "We don't know; we just throw them away." I could have killed him. What had obviously happened, when they started out there was a need for twelve copies and some efficiency expert had reduced it to four, but had never issued an order that they only sign four.

I think that's what happened on that jungle training camp. The government bureaucracy--I'm getting more and more impressed as I grow older with the fact that knowledge in one field corresponds to knowledge in other fields, and the government bureaucracy to me is like Newton's first law of physics [motion]: a body in motion will continue in motion in the same direction, and a body at rest will stay at rest until acted upon by an outside force. That is the government bureaucracy. If it is doing something it will continue to do something, just like Newton's first law, and if it is not doing anything it won't do it, just like Newton's first law, not until somebody comes along and gives orders.

I wish I could remember it. There was some kind of a report on morale which stated that a lot of silly things were going on, and the only reason I remember it at all--it really wasn't much of a report--was because Johnson, reading it over, came to a line which went something like this: "We agree that the members of the armed forces should have adequate recreation facilities, dance halls, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, and

Reedy -- XXIII -- 27

swimming pools"--and Johnson suddenly stopped at that point, and he said, "Swimming pools? How many swimming pools did we find?" Somebody said, "Well, there was that swimming pool at such-and-such a base." Johnson said, "You remind me of the little boy in the poker game. You ask him what he's got and he says, 'Aces.' And they say, 'How many aces?' and he says, 'One aces.' Goddamn it, there was one swimming pool and I want you to say in that report that there was one swimming pool." That's the only reason I remember it at all. It was sort of a humorous thing.

G: There was a question regarding the C-119 cargo plane and the contract of that, the Kaiser-Fraser cost versus the Fairchild cost.

R: I remember that. That was an incredible, incredibly complicated mess. Again, everyone thinks of bookkeeping as an exact science and it's not. The question was--I'd have to actually go back and look at the documents to recreate it. I dimly remember it, and what I remember is the thing was really just too complicated to come to a firm conclusion on, because you're right, that was the question, whether you figure that an outfit that's already in production--but you want a second source just so you don't get completely at somebody's mercy. So you try to get somebody else into the game. Now, that somebody else has to tool up, and that takes some time. I remember it, but God, was it complicated.

G: So that would mean a higher per-unit cost?

R: Well, of course. You know, something like--any newspaperman is familiar with this. If you're going to print something, it costs you about twenty times as much to print the first two thousand as it does to print the next fifty thousand.

G: The committee recommended a reduction of military bands.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 28

- R: Oh, I think that was part of that--I couldn't get very excited about it at the time, and I can't now. I think we had a couple of investigators that were sort of at loose ends.
- G: Was there a feeling that too much stuff, government equipment and supplies, had been sold off as surplus?
- R: Yes. There very definitely was, and that led to one of the most interesting reports that I think we ever issued. The trouble was the amount of money involved was so tiny that it didn't make much of a splash. But there was a report on some tires, and it was absolutely incredible. They had bought the tires at, I forget what the price was, but at standard price. The tires were declared surplus, sold as surplus, and then later, for some reason, the army needed them again so they bought them back at a much higher price than they had for new. Then they didn't need them, and again they were sold off, then they were bought back again. Those tires, which I think cost about nineteen dollars apiece or something like that, finally wound up costing about seventy-five dollars each. Now there were only five or six tires involved, and we did not pretend in the report that all army procurement was like that, because it obviously isn't. But we printed it primarily to demonstrate what your basic problem is in trying to control waste. Percentage-wise, there was a considerable amount of waste, but people were unlikely to pick it up simply because it was too small. You know, sometimes little tiny things you don't see. Ever since that particular report I have had no sympathy for the kind of politician who says that he's not going to have to raise taxes because he's going to take it out of the money that's wasted. Well, there is a lot of money wasted, but try and find it. It's like those little tires.

Reedy -- XXIII -- 29

G: The airbase construction, particularly the one in Morocco, became an issue where it was alleged that the quarters were too elaborately decorated.

R: There were all kinds of things like that which really weren't too important in my judgment. I think what really was happening there is whenever you construct military installations in countries like that you're going to have to grease a lot of palms. And I think that that was the real reason for the very high cost. I don't think it was a question of overelaborate quarters or anything like that; I think it was just all the palms they had to grease. They had to charge it off to something.

G: This one did become highly publicized. The one in Morocco where the wife of the commander was blamed for--

R: It did, and I always thought in a sense that was a little unfair. I wasn't too happy with that report, you know. I don't think it was very substantial.

G: He received another cover story in 1952, in *U.S. News*.

R: This one was pretty good. He didn't get into that butter nonsense here. I remember this one; I was with him when he did it. They have an especially equipped room down at *U.S. News and World Report* where you have no sign of microphones or anything else. You just sit in the room talking, but the equipment is so sensitive it picks up everything. This is one of his better interviews. This is good.

G: Was the Pentagon generally cooperative in supporting the investigations?

R: Oh, yes. We didn't have any real problem with them. Once it became clear that we weren't going to strike any real low blows--I think we had some trouble with them after that *Newsweek* deal, for which I don't blame them. But of course, that was not directed

Reedy -- XXIII -- 30

so much at the Pentagon as it was at--oh, kind of overall procurement, things of that nature. But we didn't have any problems with the Pentagon.

G: You've talked about the need for tungsten in the antitank weapons, but let me ask you about munitions shortages generally. Was this a problem during the Korean War? I know the committee did several reports on munitions shortages.

R: We didn't have any problems. We had enough munitions to fight the Korean War, yes, although a number of things that we would have been better off [having] weren't ready yet, weren't off the line. But when you talk about shortages, a better word would be shortfall. Things weren't coming through as fast as they should have come through, or rather, as fast as they had been planned to come through. And most of that criticism was not directed quite so much at the Korean thing as it was at the overall state of our preparedness. Now, what happened--we had one very good session in which we really grilled a number of officials on why in the devil was everything so slow? And it was, it was coming very slow. Those figures, by the way, in that *Newsweek* article are quite accurate. Things were that bad. But to a great extent it was because, I think, their plans had been a little too ambitious. I think that the scientific breakthroughs and the technological breakthroughs they had expected didn't come through as fast as they should. And as a result, these things just weren't rolling off the line.

You know, these things are always very tricky. I found out when I was a member of Struthers Wells, the engineering organization, just how tricky they can be. Any engineer will tell you that if you design something in engineering, you start out with a prototype, and the prototype will work beautifully until you double it and put it into a practical size, and all of a sudden you discover it's not working at all, that the mere

Reedy -- XXIII -- 31

changing of the size will render something inefficient. And I think that basically that was the problem here. We were in a period of history in which tremendous changes were being made, and the sorts of things that were being used in warfare, like the antitank program that I spoke of in tungsten, that the antitank program had been developed about five or six years before the committee report. It was brand new. There had been antitank weapons before but they weren't nearly as effective as this new shell with the thin tungsten skin on the outside, and the heavy lead blob on the inside. And everything was like that. We were going through a new generation of airplanes, of fighters and bombers both. Ships were being radically altered. Rocketry was becoming much more important than it had ever been before. I think that basically was it: we were in this sort of push-button warfare and we didn't have the button yet. We had the push but not the button.

G: Military indoctrination centers: the committee looked at a number of these with regard to the inefficient reception and processing procedures and the shortage of instructors there, the--

R: That's where that marine thing came out, that San Diego Marine Corps recruit depot. The San Diego thing, I think, led to more caution, and I don't believe that we put out anything quite as flamboyant as that San Diego report again. I can barely remember these other things. I see you've got this manpower utilization of military indoctrination centers, replacement of "chair corps" . . . I don't know where this "lower physical standards of acceptability". . . Actually what was beginning to happen to us already, I think, was higher standards. One of the problems in Vietnam--there was a problem I'm very familiar with, because I served in the Burke Marshall commission that investigated the selective

Reedy -- XXIII -- 32

service. One of the problems [was], all sorts of blacks who wanted to get into the army and the Marine Corps couldn't. They couldn't meet the standards. The modern soldier has to have a much better education than did the soldier in World War II. During World War II, as long as you could be trained to fire a rifle you were still a soldier. Now you've got to know all sorts of things about rockets, and about radio equipment, and electronic equipment, and what have you.

G: What was the impact of the Preparedness Subcommittee's work on Johnson's career?

R: Oh, I think it was terribly important. It took him out of the class of Texas senator. Up to that point, Texas senators were unquestionably--well, Texas had always been a very potent force inside the Congress, both the House and the Senate, for many years, but nobody really thought of Texans on the national scene. John Nance Garner got there by a deal because Roosevelt needed the Texas delegation. And generally speaking, when Johnson came up, people thought of him as just another Texas senator. There was a lot written about him at various times as a cornpone, sort of assuming that this was another hick, and very few people knew him. He had made a big splash in New Deal circles in Washington, but not a big splash with the press. I think the real impact of the Preparedness Committee was that it made him look substantial, that this was a man who was not just there to get a bunch of projects for Texas. This was a man who was involved in some very serious work that affected the whole nation. Now of course, in one sense he was rather lucky. Any time you go into defense and do things that make defense stronger, you're going to make the Texas economy stronger, too, because an awful lot of defense centers around Texas: air force, airbases, oil. Texas certainly wasn't

Reedy -- XXIII -- 33

hurt. But nevertheless it became apparent to the public that this man was not just another Texas senator.

G: He had been on the Naval Affairs Committee in the House. Did this involvement in this subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee help with his education of the armed services from the standpoint of the Senate?

R: I think so. When he was on the Naval Affairs Committee there were two committees. There was the Military Affairs Committee and the Naval Affairs. And the same thing was true of the Senate. They were combined by the Legislative Reorganization Act. Obviously, serving under "Uncle Carl" Vinson he had gotten to know an awful lot about the navy, but I don't know how much he had gotten to know about world strategy. You know how he got on Naval Affairs, don't you? The story of Roosevelt and Vinson?

But I think the biggest thing of all, of course, was that being chairman of the Preparedness Committee gave him that opportunity to launch the outer space program, and that, I think, was the real thing that catapulted Lyndon Baines Johnson into the White House ultimately. Other things were terribly important: the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Even though the liberals said it was a very weak bill, *et cetera*, the mere fact that it was a Texas senator that steered it through the Congress, the first bill since 1875, or whenever the last one--I think it was 1875. That did take the regional curse off of him. But the Preparedness Committee and the investigation of outer space, that was the path to the presidency. I'll never forget, during that investigation of outer space, that marvelous Yardley cartoon in the *Baltimore Sun*. If the Library doesn't have that it sure ought to get it. It showed a bunch of people in space suits landing somewhere on some planet, and Lyndon Johnson, obviously in the advance space suit, saying, "Take me to

Reedy -- XXIII -- 34

your leader," to a bunch of little funny things around the place. But there he looked bigger than Eisenhower. Eisenhower made a very bad mistake in the outer space thing. He scoffed at it. What was it [he said]? "Lyndon can keep his head in the stars; I'll keep my feet on the ground." That was a mistake, because people sensed that there was something here that went over and above most projects. Now I frankly think that we got a little bit too visionary in that space program and saw all sorts of things that weren't there. But nevertheless there were some things that were there. That's what made him president.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XXIII

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

GEORGE E. REEDY

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, George E. Reedy of Milwaukee, Wisconsin do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on June 12, 1985; June 13, 1985; September 25, 1986; January 7, 1987; January 8, 1988; August 28, 1988; February 6, 1990; August 7, 1990; November 11, 1990; and December 13, 1990, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.
- (3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

George E. Reedy
Donor August 24, 1995

August 24, 1995
Date
John W. Cal
Archivist of the United States
9-13-95
Date