INTERVIEW XXVI

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

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G: --1964 last time.

R: Right.

G: You had begun a discussion of the vice presidential selection and his choice of Humphrey.

R: It was a rather interesting situation. I had never before known Johnson to play the cards quite that close to the vest. He always played them close to the vest, but this time it was, my God, the secrets of the atomic bomb weren't nearly as well kept. I doubt if even Lady Bird could have given you a good guess.

I had an idea that he might go for somebody like Gene McCarthy, seeing that the Catholic vote had become a very important factor and that I don't think anybody else could really bring him anything, particularly. I wasn't even sure that Gene could, but I wouldn't have sworn that anybody could.

Now he started out by ruling out certain people. And there was no doubt whatsoever that Bobby Kennedy was the objective of it. He issued his famous dictum, which was that nobody serving in a government position in the executive branch could become a candidate.

Somebody said, do you mean Bobby? Well, then he found a clipping somewhere of somebody trying to promote [Robert] McNamara, who was the secretary of defense. Somebody else had an article suggesting [Secretary of State, Dean] Rusk. He said he wanted to put an end to--all members of his cabinet, that was it. Unquestionably that was aimed at Bobby.

I've never before seen a case in which any two men were so immediately antagonistic to each other as he and Bobby Kennedy.

G: Why do you think he chose [Hubert] Humphrey?

R: All sorts of reasons. I think he was more comfortable with him, for one thing. It may well be that he figured even choosing Gene--oh, even choosing Gene McCarthy, I think he might have thought it would get him too close to the Kennedys. And he wanted his presidency to be completely and absolutely independent. In other words, as long as he was serving as a vice president--and here I'm guessing, but it's what you'd call an informed guess, meaning that I know Lyndon Johnson very well. I think as long as he was serving out Jack Kennedy's term, he regarded it as Jack Kennedy's term, which meant that he was to keep on all of the Kennedy people that he possibly could. But he wanted to be elected in his own right.

Now Hubert Humphrey was not in any way connected with the Kennedys. In fact, during the primaries, he had run against Kennedy for the Democratic nomination, ran against him in West Virginia, ran against him in Wisconsin and several other places.

But one of the things that was going on that I didn't know about, and none of my colleagues knew about it, either--I have never fathomed how he succeeded in doing

this--he took polls on the vice-presidential candidate. He polled what would happen if you nominated Humphrey, what would happen if you nominated Bobby, what would happen if you nominated McCarthy. And the polls, he said later--the first I heard of them was when he announced that the polls showed that there was no more than a 2 per cent difference, and that the question of selecting a vice president had nothing whatsoever to do with his election. And I think that he was trying to create an impression there--by God, you know, I'm going to pick my vice president because he's the best man for the job, not because he's going to bring me some votes.

Now as I said, I think, however, that what was really in his mind was to be his own president, and Hubert Humphrey was closer to that [ideal] than anything else. Don't forget, Hubert had been the state director of the NYA [National Youth Administration] in Minnesota at the same time that Johnson was the state director of the NYA in Texas. They'd had a much longer relationship than most people realized, because those NYA directors, I gather, did--they fraternized quite a bit. He and "Kissing Jim" Folsom, for instance, were rather close. And there are a couple of others whose names I have now forgotten.

Well, he kept being very deceptive right up to the last minute. The night before the Democratic convention vote on who'd be the president and the vice president--obviously it was going to be Johnson--he had a big party in the White House, mostly attended by newspapermen. And who did he fly up to Atlantic City with? Tom Dodd. And he was deliberately starting a rumor that Tom Dodd was going to be his vice president. And I've often wondered if Tom thought so. I doubt it. But at any rate, that

was it.

As I said, I think he selected Hubert Humphrey because he regarded Hubert Humphrey as being more in his camp, his league, his genre, than he did any other vice presidential candidate.

G: Do you think that this charade was simply designed to add some suspense to the convention?

R: Not particularly. This was a chronic thing with him. He had this absolute fetish about keeping his options open. If he made up his mind to appoint somebody to a job and the announcement came out before the official appointment was made, that guy lost the job.

I remember all sorts of games he played. He played one with, let's see, what was the job now? The secretary of the treasury? Yes. He played a bunch of games with the secretary of the treasury in which he deliberately misled a couple of networks, *et cetera*, as to whom he was going to appoint.

This was just part of his psychology. I've never decided whether he really was worried about putting the name out officially until he had checked and thought of every angle. That's one explanation, that he was supercautious, that he was a real worrywart, and he was; he was a worrywart.

But there's another explanation which I think is more likely. He loved playing games with people. Johnson loved pulling the wool over your eyes, even if it had nothing to do with any advantage to him. He was constantly trying to trap Lady Bird one way or another. I suspect that he even played games with Lynda Bird and Luci, which--I don't know that, but I suspect it. But this was a common state of affairs for him.

G: When you say he was constantly trying to trap Lady Bird--

R: Into a--well, for instance, when he had the heart attack in 1955, you know that story?

G: Well, I know that he had it out at Huntlands, out at George Brown's estate.

R: He was in the hospital and he suspected the doctors weren't giving it to him straight. So Lady Bird was in there, in his hospital room out at Bethesda and he starts to moaning, "Oh. my darling, oh, my darling," he said, "I finally heard what the doctors say. The doctors say that I've only got one chance in a hundred to survive." And Bird pipes up, "That's not true, Lyndon; they say it's fifty-fifty." That's typical.

He just loved doing things like that. He loved trapping newspapermen into writing a phony story. You know, I just suddenly realized that was also a game of [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt's. Roosevelt was always trying to trap newspapermen into writing phony stories, and Johnson's admiration for Roosevelt was really very deep, and he imitated Roosevelt every way he possibly could. However, I think he played this game simply for enjoyment.

G: How did he imitate Roosevelt?

R: Trying to fool people. For instance, he tried to trap the press into writing a story that Tom Dodd was going to be the vice presidential nominee. That was a typical Roosevelt ploy. Roosevelt was very famous for the manner in which he finally notified the press that he was going to run for a third term.

What he would do would be to put out certain dates that he was going to do something, but put them out in such in a way as to lead the press to suspect that he was going to make the announcement at that point, that he was going to run for the third term.

And then when a number of them had written stories like that, he'd chuckle gleefully and point out to them that the dates that he'd given them had two or three different meanings, that sort of thing. I can't remember it specifically, but it happened all the time. He got a big kick out of it.

G: Did Johnson ever consider not seeking the nomination again in 1964?

R: Of course, he considered it. But again, here you get to something very basic about Johnson, very basic. He was always resigning from something. He never resigned, but he was always resigning. And I am not sure--I knew that he was going to run again; I had no doubt whatsoever in my mind, but he kept talking as though he might not. And I was never sure of whether he really believed that, that he might possibly not run, or whether it was a device to leave people aghast and say to him, "Oh my God, Lyndon, you can't do that. You have got to run." Or whether it was just obfuscation--throw up a smoke screen, confuse everybody, make it impossible to get a real opponent for the presidency.

Johnson was not a very subtle man when it came to thinking, but once he had made up his mind on what he wanted done, he could be extraordinarily subtle in the steps that he would take to get where he wanted to go. Johnson's lack of subtlety was in fixing goals. There he was very unsubtle and really gave it very little thought. He reacted instinctively to goals. But when action was involved, oof!

G: Do you remember any specific conversations in which he was weighing whether or not to run?

R: Well, the main one that I remember was the night before he flew up to Atlantic City to accept the nomination. Haven't I told you that story?

G: No.

R: Wow. I was working late in the White House; I forget why. And pretty late that night, in fact it was almost midnight, as I remember, he asked me to come out for a walk. We walked up and down the South Lawn of the White House and he was telling me that he was going to go up there tomorrow and turn down the nomination. And he used rather straight, vulgar language; you might as well keep the record straight. He'd kind of say, "Fuck 'em, they don't want me anyway. Fuck 'em. I'm going to go up and fuck 'em. I'm going to tell them that I'm not going to accept the nomination." Whew! He sounded like he really meant it.

Well, at that point I was terrified, because if he actually did that, it would have thrown the convention into the greatest confusion of anything since 1924. For one thing, he had by that time established complete control over the convention. They'd seated that Mississippi delegation that came up with strange credentials. He'd straightened out a number of those various delegates. He'd headed off any Kennedy movement at the pass. There was never an organized Kennedy movement at the convention, but I think that under certain circumstances Bobby might have made a try for it.

What he did was set aside a special day for Jack Kennedy right at the start and sort of got it out of everybody's system. After that, he was in complete control. So if he had pulled out at the last minute, what you would have had would have been a very frantic scramble, which certainly would have involved Bobby, certainly would have involved Hubert Humphrey, probably would have involved Gene McCarthy. And I could see the Democratic party tearing itself to pieces, and maybe even Barry Goldwater

coming in as president. And that man, he had me convinced. And I went home that night and I don't think I slept all night long.

The next day, he has a party, gets in the airplane, flies to Atlantic City and accepts the nomination. We must have been walking up and down that lawn for--I say two hours, more likely an hour, or something like that. But it was an ungodly long period of time.

G: Was anyone else there?

R: No.

G: What did you say? Did you try to dissuade him?

R: I tried to talk him out of it and the more I tried to talk him out of it, the more vehement he became. And again, I had been through that many times before, but this time I believed it.

I remember one night when he was a senator, being back in [Felton] Skeeter Johnson's office--Skeeter was the secretary of the Senate at that point--having a drink, and there was Johnson and there was Bill Knowland, the Republican leader, and there was--Earle Clements was there, I believe. He was the whip at the point. And I was there. And he started to say he was going to resign the majority leadership, and that left everybody, including Knowland, begging him not to do it. And he even got to a point where he started to speculate on who could be the leader.

I didn't fall for it that night, but that was a very, very common thing with him. He was always resigning from something, but he never really did. And I don't know why he was always resigning again. Was it to get people to beg and plead with him not to, which he dearly loved, or was it to confuse the situation? You know, something like a smoke

screen. If you know what you're doing when you throw up a smoke screen, you're going to be all right. It's the other guy that's going to be in trouble. Or was it that he just liked to play games with people? I suspect it was a combination of all three.

G: Okay, you've talked about some elements of the campaign, the Labor Day event in Detroit.

R: Yes. That was funny.

G: How about the *Lady Bird Special* and the train trip through the South? Any insights on that?

R: Not in particular. It was very well handled. They sent along Hale Boggs, I think primarily in case there was any rough stuff. You know, Hale was a real rough-and-tumble campaigner. He knew how to handle hecklers and all that sort of thing.

I remember one speech that he made, though, on the trip. He began to flail away at the good old South, the South of grits and ham gravy, the whole works. And those of us reading the accounts of it had a picture of Hale getting sick and tired of all this frou-frou.

(Interruption)

You know, here he was in this train. All the reporters in the train were female, and Liz [Carpenter] had fixed it up with all kinds of frou-frou signs about no sharing a compartment with a male roommate, or anything like that, and all this typically feminine stuff. And if there was one masculine man, it was Hale Boggs. And somebody said he probably went back to his compartment and slugged down a couple of big swigs of bourbon and then went out and made that speech about corn pone, potlikker and grits,

which I suspect was probably true. But it was a very effective thing; God, it was effective. It was effective.

G: His [October 9, 1964] speech in New Orleans was a very good--

R: The Johnson speech?

G: Yes.

R: Boy, that was great.

G: Were you there for that?

R: Goddamn right I was. I mean, the one--"nigger, nigger, nigger?" ["Negro, Negro, Negro."]

G: Yes.

R: You know, I had gone in--I was ready to quit. And then all of a sudden he made that speech, and I was going to quit that night.

G: He had been boorish in the day?

R: Boorish? Hell! Attila the Hun was a gentleman compared to the way he'd been.

G: Why was he in such a foul mood?

R: I don't know. Johnson was a tormented man. That's why I believe he is going to be, in the long run, the most fascinating president in our history. Something was eating away at him. And I don't think we'll ever know what it is, but I don't think that'll prevent people from speculating.

But on that New Orleans thing: he had a speech that had been written. I've even forgot[ten] who wrote it now, and it was a good speech. And by the way, Kay Graham was in the audience, and Chal [Chalmers] Roberts. Kay was just down there visiting or

something, I've forgotten what, and I don't know why Chal was there, but they took in the speech.

And when he got into that--it was handled superbly. Have you got the precise text, did somebody record it, I hope?

G: Yes.

R: The timing of it was incredible. He talked about, "this man from this state, I won't tell you what it is, but it's not very far from here." And how he left this state and again, "I won't tell you what it is, but it's"--of course everybody knew what he was talking about. How he went into Texas, *et cetera*, and in his old age, he went up to see Sam Rayburn. "[He] said, 'Sammie, I'm going to go on back to'--and I won't tell you what it is but it's not very far from here." And oh boy, that still sends shivers up and down my spine. God, what a speech that was! What was the impact on the audience?

G: They stood up and they just went wild. He had showed them the whole tragedy of the South. All the years in which they had elected bums, and rascals, and thieves, because of the blacks.

It was one of the most compelling moments in my life. What a speech! I didn't quit.

G: Did his mood change after that speech? Was he better the next day?

R: Somewhat, yes. I'm trying to remember now, I think we went back to the Ranch. No, we didn't. What did we do? I've actually forgotten.

G: Some have suggested that that was the best speech he ever made.

R: It was. In terms of impact, the best speech that anybody ever made. You had to be there;

you could feel the audience, you know, to . . .

G: Did he reflect on that speech at the Ranch or later on?

R: No. No. He was at his best, though, in that kind of a situation. He could establish a rapport with an audience that was incredible. It really wouldn't be a speech. He'd be talking to them and they'd be reacting.

G: How much of it was spontaneous and how much--?

R: All of it.

G: All of it was?

R: Not the whole speech, but that part was. Up to that point it had just been a good speech.

(Interruption)

(Inaudible)--a son of a bitch than Lyndon Baines Johnson. You'd want to murder him. And he was awfully good at striking at sore spots. God, he was good at it. When he'd start picking on you--with me it was always "them labor goons and them Irish thugs." And of course that didn't affect me too much because it was just too goddamn ridiculous. He knew damn well that if it hadn't been for me, he'd never had any Irish vote or any labor vote.

But it's difficult to convey to somebody just how nasty he could be, including to Bird. He'd be terribly nasty to her. There's only one person that I know for sure that never felt the rough edge of his tongue, and that was Helen [Williams]. You know, Gene's wife. For some reason, she could always anticipate everything. Oh, Dorothy Nichols; both of them could deflect him. He was never nasty to either one. The closest he ever came to being nasty to Dorothy was one day when he walked into the office, and

Dorothy Nichols and Juanita Roberts--this was when he was Senate leader--Dorothy Nichols and Juanita Roberts were the staff in his Senate office, that is over in, not the Senate office building [but] his office in the Capitol. And they really did the best job that anybody ever did for him in that office. They really had that thing licked. And he came in and he announced that he [had] decided he was going to rotate people in the office. Everybody would be in there, and Dorothy and Juanita could go back to the Texas office. And he was going to bring in--he brought in Mary Margaret [Wiley], is what he did, which is why he did it, I guess. Mary Margaret, and who was the other--oh, Dorothy--no, Mary Rather. And Juanita, of course, she had to have a job, so she went back to the Texas office. But he said, I've got a good idea," and Dorothy said, "Well, I've got a good idea, too. I think I'm going to go on home. Good-bye!" And she picked up her purse and coat and walked out. But she and Helen both knew how to handle him. There's some significance to that. I wish I could figure it out.

I knew a lot of people that knew how to get him to do what they wanted him to do. Bill Moyers was very good at that. But those are the only two that he never under any circumstances got nasty at.

G: Another--

R: Oh, no: Glynn Stegall, or Mildred. I forgot them.

G: They could-- No, they couldn't handle him, but for some reason, he really--I think it's [that] he really liked Glynn and realized that, you know, Glynn had high blood pressure and high this and high that, and a session with Johnson, I think, might have driven Glynn right into the hospital. So he left Glynn--he was very careful to be nice to Glynn at all

points, and I think nice to Mildred, too, so it wouldn't disrupt Glynn. But boy, what a bastard he could be.

G: Any other events during the campaign that you remember? The trip to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in New York?

R: I don't remember that, for some reason. You know, during that whole campaign I felt it was completely useless. I didn't even see any sense in campaigning. I thought--and I told him this--I thought we were better off just staying in Washington, and let him be president, and let Barry Goldwater go out and make votes for us. Barry Goldwater was making votes faster for us than we were.

You know, Goldwater was incredible. You have to realize that Goldwater--who's a hell of a nice guy, by the way--Barry wasn't interested in votes. He wanted converts. I don't think Barry wanted to be president. What he wanted, however, was a platform in order to spread the doctrine.

The only incident that's very strongly in my mind is when Goldwater made some idiotic proposal to eliminate civil rights from the presidential debate, on the grounds that it was divisive.

G: You did talk about that at some length in the last session. There was a *New York Times* story during the campaign that LBJ was taking a dangerous risk in mingling with the crowds. Do you remember that and his reaction?

R: I don't remember the story, but I know a lot of people thought that he was taking a dangerous risk.

G: Was he offended by this?

R: I don't think he paid any attention to it. You could not keep LBJ out of a crowd when he was feeling good. And of course those crowds at that particular point were really looking upon him--because you know what really made that tremendous majority in that election was fear of Barry Goldwater. God, people were afraid of that man. And it [was] totally unjustified. Barry Goldwater is in reality a very nice, sweet, simple, gentle man. And I mean it, in every sense of the word. This impression of Barry Goldwater as a fire-breathing right-wing bomb-tosser bears no relationship to reality. But he had a bunch of people around him that were scary, and Barry was a genius at stating things in such a way that he was going to get the maximum opposition.

So here are all those crowds, and they looked upon Johnson as though he were Jesus coming into Jerusalem. You know, he wasn't just president; he was their savior. He was going to save them from Barry Goldwater. I could see him walking down the line, touching hands, he wasn't even shaking them anymore. He used to just tap them on the back of the hand. But God, you could see their eyes light up, just like a medieval peasant being touched by the king for scrofula. And you weren't going to keep him out of crowds like that. Poor Secret Service. I felt sorry for them.

I remember one other thing out of the campaign. That was the business of landing in Phoenix, deliberately, to go to church and that was because about half of Phoenix turned out to cheer him, [in] Barry Goldwater's home town.

G: Tell me about that.

R: There isn't much to tell. He was heading for the West and he scheduled a stop at Phoenix, not even a speech, nothing, just scheduled a stop so he could go to church. Ha!

That great churchman, Lyndon Baines Johnson. And we got off the plane and my God, the streets were just lined with cheering, shouting people holding up big signs, "This is your country, Lyndon Johnson," "This is your country, LBJ." I should have checked; I forgot to check to find out whether Goldwater carried Phoenix or not. I know he carried the state, but he must have carried Phoenix; I can't imagine Goldwater carrying Tucson against Johnson. But it was done deliberately, just to sort of fire a shot across the bow.

The other I remembered is the way he kept picking up polls. The polls from the very beginning showed him so far ahead of Barry Goldwater that--so that every time a newspaperman came near him, the newspaperman would be slipped a poll.

I remember when he and I went to a mass at that Episcopal church in Fredericksburg. We were both kneeling at the communion rail, all of a sudden, I felt a nudge, and he was handing me a poll.

G: He also courted the support of Eugene Pulliam, didn't he, the publisher of the Indianapolis [*Star*] and Arizona [*Republic*]--?

R: Oh, he already had that. He already had that. I don't know how he got Pulliam originally, because he certainly did not stand for a single thing that Gene Pulliam stood for. Pulliam was one of the most conservative newspaper publishers that ever lived, and why he became so enamored of Lyndon Johnson, I will never know. I don't know of anything in particular that Johnson did for him. But somehow he had a group of those western publishers: Palmer Hoyt, Gene Pulliam--and Gene, of course, is both Indiana and Arizona--it just made no sense to me. Of course I was grateful for it, but still it made no sense.

G: He seems to have begun to have some problems with credibility in the press in 1964, the first instance being on the projection of the budget, and ultimately bringing it in under $100 billion.

R: That was awful.

G: Tell me about that.

R: He was determined to bring the budget in under $100 billion, and it didn't look like it was possible. I just refused to comment on it; I said, "I haven't seen any figure yet under $100 billion," which I hadn't. And he kept at it and kept at it, and I think he was leaking stories that it was impossible to do. And finally the budget came out and it was something like $200 million below $100 billion, something like that, you know, ridiculous. I gasped and so did everybody else, and I checked to see how in the hell he'd done it. And basically it was a bookkeeping proposition. Charlie Schultze had figured it out. But there was something, and I don't understand this, I don't want to understand it; if you really want to understand it, ask Joe Laitin or Charlie Schultze. Joe, I think, will give you a better explanation. It was something about some money that should have been in there as a debit, but could be pushed--I think it was $400 million--but could be pushed forward to the next year and therefore taken off of the debit figures for 1964, or whatever the year was. And I think he did it primarily--well, I think he enjoyed playing the games with the press, for one thing. And for another thing, I think that he wanted to get a reputation as a miracle worker. And I think it worked.

He did all sorts of peculiar things that sound a little bit silly but were very effective. One of his attributes--Johnson understood symbolic communication better than

anybody else I've ever known. And that was one [example] of it, when he got that budget under $100 billion. The press figured it out pretty quick, but that didn't matter. Everybody up on Wall Street said, "Aha, he really is going to cut expenses and hold the line."

He did things like pump out stories--not pump them out directly, of course. I imagine he had [Jack] Valenti or somebody like [him] do that. How he walked through the White House, turning out lights--

(Interruption)

Johnson understood symbolic communication better than any other person I've ever known, even though he couldn't name it to you or tell you what he was doing. He did it instinctively. And a thing like that, that budget deal, even though the press thought it was funny, which I think it was too, nevertheless it impressed a lot of wealthy people and a lot of businessmen. And the same thing was true of that little business of his going through the White House, flicking off the lights. Boy, oh boy, up in Wall Street that went over, "That man knows the value of a dollar!"

G: There are suggestions that this was the beginning of the credibility gap, though.

R: It was. Well, the budget thing was. That was just amusing. But I think the thing that did more to create the credibility gap than anything else was Bobby Baker. That was one of the most ill-advised things Johnson ever did. You know the whole story?

G: He said, "Bobby who?" Is that--

R: No, that was one of the imitations that they gave. What he did--he set this up entirely with Abe Fortas. That has to [be] stated in order to understand what happened.

Abe was a lawyer and lawyers are accustomed to the exclusion of irrelevant evidence, sometimes even when the evidence is relevant, but you exclude it for some other reason, and the narrowing-in on very specific procedural points. Well, when the Bobby Baker case broke in the first place, my impulse--and I was absolutely right, I teach this now in my course in political communications--was [to] lay out the whole damn thing. Let the press see it. [Inaudible] It wasn't bad at all.

Bobby was using Johnson and using him quite a bit. You know, dropping his name all over the place to get those loans for the Bobby Baker's Carousel and also for the Serv-U Corporation, and things like that. And Bobby, I think, had gotten to him on the same basis--Luigi Barzini has a marvelous chapter in his book *The Italians* on the seduction of older men. Not sexual seduction, but older [men] looking for a son, and Bobby understood that technique.

But Johnson had found Bobby highly useful, no ifs, ands, or buts, when he was in the Senate. And day after day, people sat up in the gallery [and] could look down and see Bobby in the seat right next to Johnson, talking back and forth. And it was no doubt whatsoever--Bobby was Lyndon Johnson's *protégé*, if the word *protégé* has any meaning whatsoever. Well, the press, when the Bobby Baker scandal really broke--which was after Johnson became--no, after he became vice president--Johnson tried to get away from that word *protégé*, and he talked to me about it and I told me he couldn't get away from it.

So he talked to Abe Fortas about it. He overly respected Abe's political ability, which was practically nil. And Abe said, "Well, how did he get the job?" And Johnson

said, "Well, he got elected by the Senate Democrats." That is, how did he get the job of secretary of the majority?

Well, of all the malarkey! The secretary of the majority is invariably picked by the leader, and Johnson had gone to work and really promoted Bobby very rapidly. He shot him right up. But the Senate Democratic caucus did have to vote on him. So Fortas' argument was that he couldn't possibly be Johnson's *protégé*, because he had been elected by the whole Democratic caucus.

He didn't even tell me that he was going to do it, I think because he knew that I would start hollering out loud. And then he'd set up what they now call a photo opportunity, in which he was going to say something for film, TV. And Merriman Smith was set up--not by me, either; he went clear around me on this one. Merriman Smith was set up--I wish that he'd gotten a full lesson of what happened when he went around me. He didn't have anything to say or any response, but he said he would take one question. Merriman Smith said, "Anything been happening lately?" And so then he went into the Bobby Baker case. He didn't name Bobby Baker, but said there was some discussion up on the Hill about this man who had not been picked by him, but was the product of all the Democrats, something like that.

Well, the press--their jaws were bouncing off the floor. You know, it was one of the most incredible misstatements, not of fact; his facts were correct, but there was some that he left out. That's where the credibility gap began, right there. The budget thing, they'd have forgotten about that, if that had been all there was to it. But they weren't going to forget that business about Bobby Baker. That was too big.

G: Did they come to you after he said that?

R: Yes.

G: What--?

R: Well, what could I do? I said I can't speak for him officially. In off-the-record conversations I was perfectly--I wasn't going to even pretend. When I was talking off the record with the press what I'd say in effect was, "Look, you've got him so he's imagining things," or something like that. And what the hell can you say? I don't want to make--I took it on the chin quite a bit for Lyndon Johnson, but I wasn't willing to take that one on the chin. That was just too stupid.

He was stupid about the press, generally speaking, though. I remember when that Billy Sol Estes scandal broke. That could have been blown out of the water in one day, but he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't let me talk to the press. All I really had to do was open up the Billy Sol Estes file. Billy Sol was in an opposition political faction. The only thing he ever got from Billy Sol was crates of melons at Christmas. Everybody sends Texas congressmen and senators things at Christmas.

G: Grapefruit and melon.

R: Yes. It's mostly to advertise Texas more than anything else. Onions, marvelous onions. And I think that Billy Sol at one point was talked into picking up the tab for a couple of radio stations out in West Texas. Cliff--oh, what was Cliff's name?

G: Carter?

R: Cliff Carter had signed him up. I don't think Johnson even knew about it. And then once Billy Sol had written to Johnson about the *bracero* program, and Johnson had in the most

stereotyped, mimeographed letter conceivable, bucked it on downtown for a response. But by refusing to say anything and let me say anything, he blew this up into a big story.

Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

G: Another incident that the press leaped on was the occasion on which LBJ picked up the beagles by the ears. Do you remember that one?

R: Yes. That was funny. It was a game. Those beagles weren't being hurt. They loved Johnson and he loved them. And he wasn't actually picking up the beagle by his ears. What would happen was the beagle would stand up and Johnson would steady him by holding on to his ears. And he did that in front of the press once, and they got some pictures, and in the picture it looked like he was lifting the beagle by the ears. But I think most of the press realized that what they were writing was really rather good-humored. Now of course, you probably got some members of the SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] in various places that would write in. But I think most of the country realized that it was just good fun. And it was kind of cute.

I remember going to a Victor Borge evening some time later. And Victor Borge talked about how he went into Johnson's office and he said, "Johnson picked me up by the ears and said, 'I pronounce you a Great Dane.'"

It became almost a trademark. You know, people visiting Johnson would expect to see him pick up the beagles by the ears, Him and Her. And the press really was not bad about it. It was a cute, humorous story.

But you know, it's funny about Johnson. In a way he had no sense of humor. He could be enormously funny, screamingly funny, but usually it was about something fairly

cruel, mimicry. God, what a mimic he was. You ought to see him mimicking Bobby Kennedy.

G: Really?

R: Oh, it was mean.

G: Was it?

R: Or Adlai Stevenson, when he [inaudible].

G: Give me an example of a Bobby Kennedy.

R: It's hard to do because it was in his facial features. But I can recall that he dearly loved telling close, intimate friends about the time he'd informed Bobby no soap, that he was not going to be the vice presidential candidate. And he gave an example of Bobby's eyes suddenly popping. But his whole face--and that's what it was in, it was in his face.

And then occasionally he could come up with very earthy, I mean earthy, remarks that were funny, but funny in a sense because they were outrageous. Again, to use some fairly strong language--the record might as well be clear--his favorite way of explaining the difference between the sixties and the twenties was that "in those days we ate in the house and shit outdoors," meaning the privy. He said, "Now, it's the other way around. We eat outdoors and shit in the house." You know, there's something outrageous about it. Or the one time when we were traveling in an airplane; there were a couple of reporters in there. I remember Frank Cormier and I forget who else, Al what's-his-name from the UP, and we had some--

G: [inaudible] Spivack?

R: Al Spivack, that's right. And I think there was a writing-pool reporter there, too, maybe

[Jeremiah] Jerry O'Leary. We had this diplomat with us who just barely spoke English. I don't know why we had him with us; I've forgotten that part of it. Johnson was talking and finally stopped and said, "Okay boys, interview the shit out of him. I've got to go take a piss." Poor Frank Cormier. He sat there trying to control the laugh, and for weeks after that every time Frank would see Johnson, you could see his chest just heaving while he was trying to keep the laughs down.

And I think I've told you what he did in Rome, didn't I, to that Outerbridge Horsey?

G: The story about the painting?

R: Yes. In things like that, he could be enormously funny. But it was not humor in the sense of kind of a gentle humor. You know, the kind that people chuckle over with a--and the dog story he totally misinterpreted. I think he thought that humor was poking fun at somebody and that--he wasn't a practical joker, thank God, but--leave that to Moyers. But I think that he thought that humor consisted of making somebody look like a damn fool. And so when people approached things like the dog story with humor, in his mind they were making him look like a damn fool.

You remember that marvelous story about Cousin Oreole? I know I've told you that one. That's another example. That was a very warm, human story.

G: Yes.

Any recollections of the Gulf of Tonkin episode?

R: Oh, plenty of them. Plenty of them. The main thing that I remember is that all of us in the White House thought that it was real. One of the troubles with a Gulf of Tonkin

episode is that presidents have to make up their minds on the basis of inadequate evidence. And then later on if the inadequate evidence turns out to be fallacious, then people that have plenty of time to examine it start criticizing them. And I think to a great extent that's what happened on the Gulf of Tonkin. I really don't believe that that was a phony setup. The reason that many people do think it was phony is because later research, done mostly by that man who was bureau chief of the *New York Herald Tribune***,** Dave Wise, illustrated that there was only a very outside chance that there was any real threat to the *Turner Joy***.** But see, we didn't know that. Those messages kept coming in, and what was happening was that the skipper of the *Turner Joy* was up on the bridge fighting his ship, which is where he should be. He didn't have enough time to go down in the cabin and compose a very careful message, saying that sonar had picked up a disturbance which might be a torpedo boat or might be a submarine. You know, porpoises will set off sonar, or a school of flying fish can set them off under some circumstances. And since then, Dave Wise interviewed all the crew members, *et cetera*, and discovered that nobody in that boat really thought they were in any danger that night. But the messages that came back to us were rather fragmentary. And I also think that Johnson, and Rusk, and McNamara, and Bundy, had kind of psyched themselves up to expect a threat. You can do that; you can psyche yourself up to expect a threat and, by God, you're going to see it.

Just how we got into Vietnam is still a mystery to me. But I'm pretty sure that part of it [was due to] certain types of expectations. They had that idiotic domino theory, which I don't think a sensible man would have accepted under any circumstances. But

they not only accepted it, but they used it to build even further. You know, Johnson was talking about how, at one point, he was going to have us be forced all the way back to San Francisco, until I remind him, "You mean, we're going to give up Hawaii?" And then he suddenly remembered that Hawaii was a state, too.

But that particular night, you couldn't get anything out of him. What information I was getting came from Bundy; some from McNamara, when I could get him. I know that at one point we had a meeting, I remember that, in which McNamara set forth what forces were in the area, what we could do. And so they set up this statement for Johnson. Let's see, was that the night he--oh, no. Wait a minute, my mind--is that the night that he called the congressional leaders in? I think he called them in before he announced the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, didn't he?

G: There were two episodes. There was this August second and then August the fourth.

R: August the fourth was the key one. August the second was the Congress--

(Interruption)

G: That's all right. We'll fill in the date.

R: The main thing that I remember that's of any importance at all, is the meeting with the congressional leadership. And [J. William] Fulbright later said that his understanding was very clear that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was to be used only for that one incident. And as you know, Johnson used it, that was our whole excuse for being in Viet--not excuse, but the whole legal coverage for being in Vietnam.

I wish that there were tapes somewhere of what was actually said that night, because my impression is that what Johnson did say--[he] did not say that he was going

to use it [only] for the Tonkin Gulf incident, but sure as the devil left that strong impression.

I think Fulbright was quite justified in saying nobody could have walked out of that meeting that night with any idea that the Tonkin Gulf Resolution was going to be a blanket for all of our later action in Vietnam. And Fulbright was solidly behind him at that point. You know, at one time, he'd even wanted to make Fulbright secretary of state. He tried to talk Jack Kennedy into it.

But the only other thing I really remember out of it was the press. This is probably the night of the fourth, come to think of it, because it certainly was after the second sighting. And everybody was very apprehensive. The press was there and we had the thing all put up on teleprompter, so he could appear and read his statement. And I remember that when they were rolling the teleprompter in, the first thing the press got was that he had denied [?]--this was when he bombed, when he bombed Hanoi [Haiphong?] or the oil fields around Hanoi, you know, from the sea. And that's where he asked for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. I'm getting--yes, that's it all right.

The presumption was that there were torpedo boats out threatening the *Turner Joy,* that they were based in the oil fields right outside of Hanoi, which is why we struck the oil fields. But aside from that, about all I really remember is the tremendous tension there was that night.

G: The two things, I guess, that came out later were the CIA-related activities off the coast of Vietnam at the time, that may have led the North Vietnamese boats to retaliate; and two, the question of whether the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had been prepared in advance

and they were just waiting for a situation to utilize it.

R: I know. I don't think so, but I don't know. That was the sort of thing that was done in [McGeorge?] Bundy's shop, and I don't think it would have been impossible to have prepared it. Well, it would have been possible to prepare that night. It was a rather simple resolution, if you go back to it carefully and read it. But it may be something that they had prepared simply because, you know, the Pentagon's got preparation for anything you can think about. If you want to, you can find plans somewhere in the Pentagon to attack Moscow, to bomb Peiping, to--you name, they've got it. And it may be that they did have a resolution like that, which they pulled out under the circumstances. But I don't think that it was one of those lying things, where they were waiting around, waiting for something to happen. I can't give you a good reason for that belief, but I just don't believe it.

G: Any insights on the classified activities that preceded the attack and how much LBJ was aware of a--?

R: We were in pretty good shape to know what was going on in North Vietnam. There was a lot of electronic surveillance, which was very effective, and I think the CIA had been poking around, but in retrospect I'm not even sure there were any North Vietnamese torpedo boats out there. I'm rather dubious.

If you read the Dave Wise book [*The Politics of Lying*], where he interviewed the crew of the *Turner Joy* and various other people, it's possible there were torpedo boats out there, but only possible. You have no direct evidence. A passing school of porpoises could have set it off. A whale can set it off. A sonar is not a discriminating instrument.

All sonar does is send out sound echoes, which bounce back to you when they hit something. That's all. And I think that if there had been a genuine attack or if those torpedo boats were really after something, that there would have been a torpedo fired, [or] they would have seen a shot crossing the bow, something. And people speculated about shots crossing the bow, but I never--that is, torpedoes. But I never saw any credible evidence that anybody had fired on the *Turner Joy*.

The other thing, of course, is whether the *Turner Joy* actually was or was not in international waters, which is a tricky proposition. I've forgotten exactly how far out they were at that particular point. But as I remember, the *Turner Joy*'s reported position was just over the line. In other words, they were just barely in international waters. Now whether that's true or not, I don't know. You're dependent there upon reports from the *Turner Joy*.

G: Now, as we move to 1965, you had the attack on the barracks at Pleiku, which did trigger the air strikes, bombing of the North. Any recollections of that episode?

R: Very little. I know my own feeling about it. That did not particularly set me off or anything. I thought, well, for the love of God, what is happening here is that the North Vietnamese have the capacity to come on down on foot and create damage in South Vietnam. But we and the South Vietnamese did not have the capacity to enter North Vietnam by foot and do damage, that is, that kind of damage. And that all we're really doing by bombing is tit for tat.

Now that worked for a while, as long as--I think there were two or three in a row; they'd bomb Pleiku and we'd bomb something. They'd set off some charges, we'd bomb

something. But along about the fourth or the fifth time, here's where I begin to get a little worried. It obviously was no longer a question of tit for tat. We were just bombing.

One of the funny things that I remember is that when one was discussing these problems in the National Security Council, my God, McNamara was much more of a dove than Rusk.

G: McNamara was more of a dove, even then?

R: Than Rusk. When I say more, I'm talking, of course, of comparatives. Rusk was quite willing to go right up to the border with China in the bombing. McNamara insisted on a fifty-mile, fire-free zone south of the line.

And McNamara was much more concerned about any action that might bring the Chinese in. I remember that clearly. And I've heard since then that that's the only place where he was concerned, that otherwise he was a hawk, and that Rusk was something of a dove, but I don't believe that. Not from what I saw.

You know, one of the troubles here is when you're sitting in a National Security Council or a cabinet meeting or something like that, you'll rarely see genuine discussion. What you're seeing is something that's kind of scripted. I don't mean really scripted, but everybody's there in his best bib and tucker, and I think that the real discussions were held [in] Johnson's Tuesday luncheons, which usually had Rusk, and McNamara, and the CIA. I think there he'd make up his mind and then the cabinet would approve it the next day, or the National Security Council--the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, actually--would approve it.

G: Any insights on the decision later that year, 1965, to commit large-scale troops to

Vietnam?

R: No, not really. That is, I don't have any. Don't forget, I'd ceased to be press secretary.

G: You left in July, is that right?

R: Yes, but I stayed in the White House a year after the surgery, when Bill Moyers took over the press secretary's job. And I did some odd jobs. I mediated the maritime strike for him, a couple of things like that.

I'm not too clear what went on in Vietnam. I think that one of the problems with Vietnam, when you're dealing in statistics on something like that, you aren't really counting things. This is one of the reasons the American people have so much difficulty understanding what was happening.

When you're dealing with enormous bodies of people, what you do is make certain assumptions. Like for instance, you assume that if after a battle you find three enemy corpses, that they probably hauled seven away. You do things like that. You set up ratios. And I'm not sure that any of the information out of Vietnam was really valid information.

Did I tell you about running into my friend that had been in the pacification program? After I had left the White House I was walking down the street one day and I ran into an old friend, a man that I hadn't seen in many years. And it turned out that he had been working in the pacification program in Vietnam, and his job was to survey the villages and find out the extent to which they were being influenced by the Viet Cong. That's where the pacification figures came from, primarily, his work. Well, we repaired to a bar for a drink. By the way, I had accepted those figures as being serious when I was

in the White House, because I knew that nobody was going to lie and people really don't lie. So consequently I figured they must be all right.

But then talking to him, he began to describe what the job was like, and the first jolt I got was that he had so many villages he had to visit, he couldn't spend more than an hour or so every month in each one of them. Now you aren't going to find much in an hour, especially when you speak no Vietnamese, which he didn't, and when your French is about like mine. You know, I can order a meal in a French restaurant if the waiter speaks some English.

And the picture suddenly hit me: Here's this long-nose in a Vietnamese village. He's a menace as long as he's there. If anybody smiles at him they'll be visited that night for some remedial education. You never can tell when the Viet Cong might lob a shell in just to get him and all the village head men.

You want to get rid of that guy. What's the easiest way to get rid of him? Tell him what he wants to hear, and if you've ever dealt with people on a fairly primitive basis, it's amazing how they can read your mind. They know exactly what you're thinking. You don't know what they're thinking. See, that's because you're top dog and they, in order to survive, must cope with you. You don't have to cope with them, so consequently their faces are just faces to you, but they have to live on their accurate identification of what you're thinking.

So here's this village telling him whatever he wants to hear. They're lying like hell, of course, but you can't blame them. *Hara-Kiri* has never been popular, even in Japan, where it's practiced. So what happens? Here comes this information he's gotten

from a bunch of Vietnamese wanting to get rid of him. That goes into Saigon, where it's consolidated.

It goes from there to the Defense Department, where it's consolidated and analyzed. That means that if there's any reality left in it at that point, it's squeezed out. It goes from the Pentagon to the Sit[uation] Room in the White House, and of course it's going to be a truthful report, *et cetera*.

Then it reaches the president himself, and it looks just as solid as the laws of the Medes and the Persians. And all it really is are radar echoes of signals the president's sending out. What do they want to hear in Saigon: what will make the Pentagon happy. What do they want to hear in the Pentagon: what will make the Sit Room of the White House happy. What do they want to hear in the Sit Room of the White House: what will make the president happy.

Now nobody has to lie to do that, but you can certainly present the information in the right form. And I'm wondering how much of what was supposed to be lying, *et cetera*, in Vietnam was that. I really don't think that Johnson was lying, and I don't think the Pentagon was either. But I do think that the figures were being warped unconsciously.

For instance, I had a lot of sympathy for [General William] Westmoreland--when was it? CBS, that said he was a liar. Hell, all he was doing was accepting the more optimistic bases for computation. And what CBS was doing was taking the more pessimistic bases for computation.

I read one article about some statistician in Vietnam who came out with a big

blast against Westmoreland. And in reading the article it was perfectly apparent that this statistician had just had more pessimistic assumptions. Now that may be the best way to do it, but it doesn't mean you're lying.

G: Any recollection of the Dominican [Republic] intervention?

R: Yes. Oh boy, do I remember that. Actually, there's nothing that Johnson ever handled better and explained worse. He did a beautiful job of handling that thing. Then he came out with a bunch of crazy explanations that made it look as though he were nothing but an imperialist going in there to extend American hegemony. Oh Lord, did he louse that one up.

He started out by getting an OAS [Organization of American States] resolution, and that was really all-important. And then he landed the troops, and that was still all right. He had the troops land and even distributing food, *et cetera*, to the populace as they went through.

And what they really did was to put a wedge right in the middle and keep the far left wing and the far right wing apart, and ultimately they supervised an honest election in which an anti-American won the election and was allowed to take the office. Now for the love of God, how can you do any better than that? But then--this is partially because he knew the Latin temperament and he knew that if there's one thing that's really hated in Latin America, it's the Marines landing on a shore. They always go back to the famous landing in Vera Cruz, where the Marines landed and took over the customs.

And so he waited till he could get soldiers in instead of marines; I think it was soldiers, like paratroopers. But then he began to--God, he put out some--really nonsense.

He fell for one story about--what was it? Eight thousand heads chopped off somewhere and--oh, the worst one was talking to the ambassador and the ambassador was hiding under the desk because of shots coming in through the window. Mother of mercy, what was really happening was, he asked the ambassador, "What's going on?" and the ambassador [said], "Well, I can hear some shots. My window's open and I can hear some shots." That became the ambassador under the desk to dodge bullets.

G: So it was Johnson, not the ambassador, who was doing the exaggerating.

R: Yes, it was just wild. If he had just gone ahead and done it and explained exactly what had happened, I think it would have been regarded as one of the greatest strokes of diplomacy in the history of our relations with Latin America. But then, in order to justify it to Latin Americans, he went ahead with all this nonsense about heads being chopped off and shots coming in through the embassy window.

And to make it even worse, the head of the CIA was there and some of the stuff he was coming up with. He was constantly naming new communists that they'd found. It was [Admiral William] Raborn, I think. He said, "We'll announce them as fast as they surface." Well, of course you're going to find some communists there. So what? Back in those days international communism was still pretty strong. If there were trouble, they were going to send in agents. That didn't mean that they were commanding anything and I don't think, generally speaking, I don't think it was a communist rebellion at all. I think it was a clash between the army and the civilian population, and the communists went in and tried to take it over, which they didn't succeed in doing. But by the time he had finished with his explanation, nobody was willing to believe the truth. You just couldn't

do it. You know, good public relations may not make you a popular person, but bad public relations can make you into a demon.

The other thing I remember is that we had just set up the White House TV room. That was an experiment where the networks got together and they set it up and they had it manned, they had hot wires twenty-four hours a day, so any time the President wanted to speak, all he had to do was come down. They could cut in; they wouldn't have to warm up cameras or anything else. Now, one little problem there is that the networks badly need a little bit of time for an announcement in case there's an emergency of some sort, where the President has to go on the air right away.

And so he gets on down there and he's waiting impatiently; he wants to get in and read his piece. I keep trying to hold him back, and eventually the signal is given and the cameras turn on. Well, I had told him, and everybody else had told him, you stand there for a minute or thirty seconds, the reason being to give the networks a chance to break in and say, "We interrupt this program to bring you word from the president of the United States," something like that.

Well, if I remember correctly, I think they had a program, "*Cimarron*" ["*Bonanza*"] is it, or something like that, where you had the man and his three sons. Well, at any rate, they were going [hums the theme from "*Bonanza*"]. All of a sudden there's the President of the United States: "I have tonight landed 16,000 . . . "[Laughter]

G: As if it's part of that program.

R: Yes. You can imagine the shock of viewers. Here they're watching a couple of cowboys and here all of a sudden, there's Lyndon Johnson, telling them he's landed troops in the

Dominican Republic. God, that was a funny one.

He used Abe Fortas quite a bit in that one, because Abe knew one of the leaders, I've forgotten whom.

G: I think he knew [Juan] Bosch, didn't he?

R: No. I don't think it was Bosch. Bundy got down there, too, and was spotted. That caused quite a bit of trouble. I've often wondered, well.

G: How did it cause trouble?

R: Well, you know, what's the White House doing with its principal security adviser down there? That sort of thing. You know, there was some shenanigans going on. It didn't matter. The thing was handled beautifully in every respect except the explanation. And the explanation turned what should have been one of Lyndon Johnson's greatest triumphs into a thing that will probably go down in history as one of his greatest failures, or errors, or what have you.

G: I wonder if the experience of the Dominican intervention, of being able to move troops in, stabilize the situation, have an election, and get the troops out cleanly, if this may have influenced his thinking on what was feasible in Vietnam?

R: I kind of doubt it. Vietnam had been going on too long. There'd been major armies. The French had had a big army in there. The South Vietnamese had a lot of troops at one time or another. I think by that time it was pretty clear that the only way you could handle it was by massing a tremendous force and moving up north.

I remember Dick Russell, who originally had been opposed to going into Vietnam at all--he suddenly came out for going north, for just invading North Vietnam. I talked to

him about it later and he said to me, "George, the American people are not going to stand for fighting a war where the objective isn't victory." He said, "I was against going in at all, because I knew that if we went in at all, that then we were going to have to go north or pull out in defeat," which is what happened.

I still wonder just how in the devil we got into that. I'm wondering whether it may not have been that first meeting that we held after Johnson came back. I think I've talked about that already. I think that may have been the beginning of it.

G: What do you remember about that meeting?

R: That meeting?

G: Yes.

R: It was a very formal meeting. It really didn't discuss any problems or anything of that nature. I remember that Adlai Stevenson, as the principal person there, because he was ambassador to the United Nations, told Johnson that the whole cabinet was behind him, that everybody understood and they would do whatever he wanted them to do in order to recover from this great shock, something like that.

But the more important thing to me is, looking around the room, I suddenly realized that what was happening, you had all the principal Kennedy people there and all the principal Johnson people, and the next thing that I realized was that everybody was in one great big poker game. I didn't figure it out at the time, but I just noticed that everybody was kind of looking at him and he was kind of uneasily looking at everybody. And later, reconstructing it, the conclusion I came to is that he had determined to keep all the Kennedy people on that he possibly could, because he wanted to show the country

that you don't kill the United States by killing a president, and I think he was looking to them for clues as to what Kennedy would have done, and I think that they were looking to him for clues as to what he wanted done. They were strictly, "The king is dead. Long live the king."

Now it didn't happen at that point, because I don't remember if we were talking about Vietnam that day, but I have a rather strong feeling that somebody misread a signal, that he got the idea from them that Kennedy would have prosecuted the war after the election. And they got the idea from him that he wanted the war prosecuted, so that meant that they would start advising him on how to win it. You know, you always do that when you're working for a president. You advise the president how to do what he wants to do, but you usually leave the "what he wants to do" pretty much to the president. And this is, I think, the beginning of how we got so deeply into Vietnam.

I doubt if anybody really knew what Kennedy would do. Ken O'Donnell later said he was planning to pull out after the election, but I don't think Ken knew. Ken at that point had to be peeled off a bar stool.

G: What do you remember about the Selma march and the voting rights speech, the "We Shall Overcome" speech on March 15?

R: Most of that was pretty much in the record. You aren't going to find very many things that you can't get out of the press. But there were a couple of interesting things. One of them, for instance--was that Selma, or was it later on when, those three northern civil rightists were killed and buried in the swamp? They had, oh, what was it? I was told they had sailors, or soldiers or marines or something, out going through the woods trying

to find them, and that raised the issue of, were they armed? The answer was no, they weren't armed, but what in the hell was going to happen, suppose they had to shoot a rattlesnake or something like that? It turned out that the FBI had given me the wrong information. It wasn't a military force, [but] some sort of a school, they were just out there, they weren't out there trying to break up kidnappers, they were just out there in the same way you'd go look for somebody that was lost in the forest.

I'll never forget poor Deke DeLoach. He was the one that relayed the information to me, and when he discovered the problems I had gotten into with the press breathing down my neck, he was very apologetic.

But you don't really have to remember too much. He locked himself up with, I think, Dick Goodwin to do that "We Shall Overcome" speech.

G: Was he shocked at the brutality that was televised during the march?

R: No, he wasn't shocked.

G: Or appalled?

R: Hard to find the proper adjective here. He wasn't shocked; he wasn't appalled, because he knew something about racist violence. That doesn't mean his feelings about it were unworthy or anything like that. It's just that he knew things like this could happen. They shouldn't be allowed to happen; he's going to do something about it. He was really in his element in that civil rights issue.

G: Did he sense that this was the right time to advance voting rights, after Selma?

R: Yes, not voting rights so much, but civil rights. After Selma he could go beyond voting rights.

G: He did meet with [George] Wallace during that period.

R: Yes.

G: Any recollection of that?

R: Just that Wallace was very polite, very--you know, it's funny. Here's Wallace floating around the country sounding like the bugles that sounded [General George] Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, and, "You'll see, when he gets into the White House and gets his hands on that man and tells him a thing or two." Boy, he was meek and mild when he came and talked to Lyndon. Everybody gets meek and mild when they walk into the Oval Room.

There wasn't anything great about--but again, on the civil rights things, you're going to find that that is pretty well covered by the press. You really don't need very much inside information.

I never even remembered talking to him about it. I didn't have to. I knew how he felt, where he stood. Most of the information that I got, I got directly from the FBI and I used it without even checking with him, because I didn't have to.

G: We haven't talked about immigration legislation that year. Any thoughts on immigration reform, changes to the national origins quotas?

R: Not really. That was the one, wasn't it, that he signed at the base of the Statue of Liberty? There's not much to say about it. It's just that he thought that something ought to be done and he did it. I don't think that would be the sort of thing that he would know much about to begin with. You know, to him, he grew up in an area where the only immigrants, so to speak, were the Germans, and they'd been there, the *landsleute* [compatriots] down in

Texas, and hell, the *landsleute* had been in that part of Texas before his people were. He always got along all right with immigrants, but I can't think of any . . . It was just, there was a bill and it was about time to do it. And they had to re-change things. You're familiar with the history of the act, aren't you? The whole immigration thing in 1923--

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

G: The immigration reforms and the signing on Ellis Island?

R: I really can't tell you much about that, because that wasn't a major cause with him. It was something he wanted to do, yes, but it wasn't in the same class with civil rights, South America, or poverty legislation, or education legislation. It was just one of those things, it was done, it was passed, he signed it, and that was it.

G: Did he view it as a civil rights measure?

R: I never heard him talk about it.

G: Your role, if any, in the Medicare legislation?

R: Not in particular, but that went so smoothly that really there's not much to talk about. You know, it's all in the press. He was very careful to give [President Harry] Truman tremendous credit for it, all that he possibly could, which I think was right. Of course it also made sure that Truman would be on his side. But basically I think it was because Truman deserved it.

Now the difficulty with pieces like that--they are extraordinarily important, but all the important things usually happened ten, fifteen, twenty years before the bill was passed.

G: Any insights on the controversy over the cigarette warning labels?

R: I never even heard him mention that. Occasionally he'd talk about his own problems with smoking, how he would just nearly go crazy when somebody would light up a cigarette in his presence. He said he hadn't had one since the heart attack. But Walter Jenkins once told me that wasn't true, that he had occasionally down at the Ranch taken a couple of puffs off a cigarette. He was a very heavy smoker at one point, very heavy. The heart attack ended that.

You know, again, that was something else. It wasn't the sort of thing he'd talk about very much. The only way you could really get some idea of his inner thinking was where there was a real crisis or where there was real opposition to a bill, where he had to sit down and really think things over.

There wasn't any real opposition to Medicare, any real opposition. The doctors had collapsed. The doctors had been the group that had killed anything like Medicare in previous years. But what had happened to them--the doctors kind of broke their pick in the Bricker Amendment, strangely enough. Their influence ever since the Bricker Amendment was defeated was a waning influence. Finally it got down to almost zero. I don't think they have any real influence today.

And I think what happened was that World War II and some of the subsequent things had increased the number of refugees that just had to have someplace to go, and I think that's why we got the impetus for the liberalized type of immigration. And furthermore, the labor unions weren't as exclusionary in the sixties as they had been in the twenties. You know, in the twenties, the labor unions were trying to freeze everything, because they were afraid of competition. Both the 1923 and 1924 acts were

passed, basically, under the prodding of the unions.

G: The beautification legislation in 1965, highway beautification--

R: That was done mostly for Lady Bird. She adopted that as her cause, and he sort of did it for her, so to speak.

G: Any recollections of the issues there and the efforts to get it--?

R: No, I'd just hear Lady Bird from time to time, when we were--say, we were driving down a highway, she'd get so disgusted at the billboards, which could be pretty damned--you know there was a period where if you went into a city, you'd just have billboards like a solid wall on either side of you. I think Lady Bird wanted something to do and she figured that that was a good thing for a presidential wife. She was a very dutiful wife.

G: The Secondary and Elementary Education Act--do you recall--which he signed, I guess, at the little school where he'd gone.

R: I'm trying to remember. I can't think of anything really involved with the passage of the acts. I think they were cooked up by one of those panels that Moyers put together. I'm not sure of that, but I'm pretty sure. I think so. And the--I'm trying to think. I'm trying to remember whether that wasn't the occasion that he announced some appointment. What in the devil was it? CBS managed to get an exclusive on it, somehow. I can't think of it right now. Somebody was appointed to something very important. It was a story in which the press was interested. I think that was the occasion, because I can remember we were all at the Ranch and we were all outdoors. It just doesn't come through. Again, there wasn't any controversy, so . . .

G: Yes. I don't--was it [the] CIA director?

R: Don't think so. Who did they appoint to that?

G: Raborn.

R: That was before the Dominican Republic.

G: That's right.

R: Because Raborn was the CIA director that was surfacing the communists.

G: Okay. The Howard University speech?

R: Written by Dick Goodwin, had some marvelous lines in it. I don't know what to say about it. It was just a damn good speech, that was all. Wait. That's not the one, is it, where the trouble is that the Negro can't escape the color of his skin? That would be Buz [Horace Busby]. I think Dick Goodwin wrote that. What a good speech.

G: How about the steel negotiations? He brought in Wayne Morse.

R: I don't know what to say about it, except that he brought in Wayne Morse to handle the actual negotiations, but meanwhile he was using Ed Weisl, Ed Weisl and [Arthur] Krim, I think, to put some heat on the steel mill owners to settle quick.

Again, that was not a particularly difficult situation because it was a straight-out, wages and hours sort of thing, and those things can always be settled once people really want to settle. You've got to get them in the mood where they want to settle. If it's straight-out wages and hours you can always strike a balance.

But again, aside from the fact that Weisl and I think Krim were brought in on it, I don't have anything particular.

G: How about Clark Clifford? Did he play a role in that as well?

R: May have, but I don't remember it. You see, I don't think Clark--that would not have

exactly been Clark's cup of tea, except possibly his advice. But when you're talking about Weisl and talking about Krim, you're talking about financial power, which is something to which the steel mill people would listen.

The strike where he really got in trouble was the airlines, the machinists' strike and the airlines. There he really stubbed his toe and stubbed it bad.

G: This is where he had [P. L. "Roy"] Siemiller to deal with, is that right?

R: I've forgotten who he had to deal with, but he made an incredibly--have I ever talked to you about it before?

G: You've mentioned it to me.

R: That was the one where--

G: He announced it before the unions had a chance to vote on it?

R: Right. You see, what had happened there, when he first became president, that railroad strike was looming and he asked me what to do about it. And I said that's simple. Get in some good negotiators like Ted Kheel and a couple of people like that. Lock them up in a room across the street and turn up the heat. And it worked, which of course it would. They did call off the strike and they did settle.

I'll never forget that airline strike, though. It went on--it was the machinists' strike and I was walking down the street one day, it was after I'd left the White House, I was saying to myself, "Hey, wait a minute. He's going to call them in, lock them up in a room and turn on the heat." I ran like hell trying to find a telephone somewhere to call somebody. I couldn't get anybody. And by God, that's exactly what he did before I could stop him.

And he suffered from the illusion or the feeling that all unions were alike. And they're all really highly individual. They all have a history, they all do things a certain way. And the machinists always turn down the first offer. Always. If you're on the management side, negotiating with the machinists, you always make your first final offer 5 per cent less than you expect to pay them. They vote it down. Then you come back, give them the 5 per cent you were going to give them anyway, and they'll approve it.

The other thing is that the power in the machinists is not in their national officers. They've got a national president, but that's only because they've got a seat on the AFL-CIO executive committee and they've got to have somebody to sit in it. The real power is in the lodge chairmen. So the people he had in negotiating didn't have the real power, because they were from the national, and the machinists do as they always did, they voted it down. Somewhere along the line some machinist or lodge chairman got the idea that if they voted something down he could get 5 per cent more, and it worked. They've been doing it ever since.

But it's funny, nothing went right after that for him. The worst part, he had made one of these screaming trips through the city and got on TV and announced dramatically the big improvement, and the next morning they voted him down on it. That was Friday night, I remember that. They voted on Saturday. Again, he consulted with nobody that really understood labor before he did that.

There was another occasion when he--it's the State of the Union message, it must have been 1966 or 1967, where he proposed putting the Labor Department and the Commerce Department together. I thought, wow, that's one of the worst things he ever

did. He talked to Willard Wirtz about it first, and he didn't realize something: Willard Wirtz actually knew nothing about organized labor. He was a social service worker. He was damn good, I'm not derogating the man, but he simply was not the kind of man that understood unions.

And my God, the whole AFL-CIO executive committee practically consisted of people who could remember back to the days when they had to fight like hell to get the Labor Department. They weren't going to give it up. I still remember poor Charlie [Schultze] sitting there and explaining all these charts that he had. Here you have the Labor Department, it's weak. Here you have a Commerce Department, it's weak, so you have arrows going in and out and you put the frammus in the forestan and all of sudden you got this strong economic agency. And Charlie sits back there expecting all those labor leaders to burst into applause. Instead he hears Dave Dubinsky: "Mr. Schultze, ve fought for this agency. Ve got our heads beaten in for this agency. Now you vant to take it avay from us. Vy?"

Poor Charlie had no idea of the emotions that were behind him. Dave Dubinsky had been a labor leader before the thing was passed. And so had George Meany. They'd done Johnson a break by not coming out in public, what they thought about it.

G: Tell me about your own transition at this point, to take a leave of absence.

R: More than a leave of absence, I quit. All sorts of things had happened. I was sick and tired, and I mean really sick and tired of all the goddamn back-stabbing and palace guard politics that were being played in the White House. That really got on my nerves.

I don't know, most people seem to come up with the conclusion this was a normal

way to live, but I just couldn't take it. That was part of it. I was sick and tired of spending my time arguing with Johnson to do things that he ought to do anyway, and I'd begun to get very dubious about Vietnam. In fact, at that point I was in a mood where I was trying to--I still remember one meeting in the cabinet where the Defense Department had come up with some figures which looked awful phony to me. I've forgotten what it was now, but just looking at the figures, it didn't seem to me to come out right. And I passed him out a little memo saying, "Why don't you ask them?" And he handed it back to me with a look that said, "For the love of--you stay out of this."

So to hell with it. I looked around, couldn't find anything at first. Had some friends that wanted to run me for the Motion Picture Association. I wasn't too interested in the job. I thought I'd take a look at it, but Valenti wanted it. He really wanted it, which was okay with me. I didn't somehow feature myself in there. I finally wound up with Struthers Wells, mostly through Walter's intervention, which was a rather frustrating experience.

G: Did you have any intention of coming back to the White House?

R: No. None whatsoever.

G: Was there any single episode with LBJ that triggered your leaving?

R: No, it was everything. It just all accumulated. As I said, I was in the hospital; I had plenty of time to think. I stayed in the White House for a while because I couldn't get around. I was in those walking casts for about four months. Then I started looking around for another job, and when I finally found it I quit. I had no intention of coming back.

I did get appointed to a couple of commissions: the Burke Marshall Commission, for instance, and the NASA, the outer space--no, not outer space, the one that set up the maritime studies. The president of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] was chairman of it, or the board chairman of MIT. A couple of things like that, but mostly I was trying to do something about Struthers Wells, which was hard to do because the man that owned it didn't understand Struthers Wells, which was a firm with which quite a bit could have been done. So it wasn't a very good couple of years for me.

G: I want to pose one question about your role in the White House, as opposed to the role that you played during the years that he was majority leader. It seems to me that during the Senate period, you served in a much broader role--

R: I did.

G: --across a whole range of issues in a very necessary--

R: I was adviser on almost everything.

G: But when he was in the White House, he had all of the cabinet, this whole assortment of aides. Would it be that just the nature of the office caused him to need a different variety of people?

R: He should have fired the whole lot. He was really awestruck by them, and by the time he realized that he had ascribed much greater powers to them than they were entitled to, it was too late.

He had brought in some people since then, but he had scattered his own people all over the earth. And the people that he tried to bring in really did not have the necessary background, like bringing in Bob Kintner, for instance. Now Kintner is one hell of an

able man, but what did he know about government? He'd written a column with Joe Alsop, but the column was a little bit different from actually having to operate the government.

And I think that the Kennedy victory in 1960, I believe it gave him a terrible inferiority complex. Now, it should not have done so. The reason he did so poorly in the 1960 primaries, *et cetera*, is that he really didn't try. He was blowing hot, blowing cold. In the morning he'd be all gung-ho and all ready to go on out and campaign. Then in the afternoon it would all evaporate and you couldn't even get him to do simple things, like okaying office supplies for the Johnson for President Committee that we had downtown. He let that come off--in a fit of something, I think Jim Rowe talked him into it.

He walked into the White House, I think, with the feeling that he didn't really belong there. And he decided his staff wasn't as good as the Kennedy staff. We were all second-rate in his mind. And I think the worst part with me as press secretary is he was afraid I might tell the press, which is really--you know, all the stuff he wouldn't let me talk about was coming out anyway, coming out mostly through Moyers. And he wasn't getting any secrecy or anything like that at all, it would pass through the hands of people, but it did not go through my hands.

G: Did you not have the access to him that you needed to perform--?

R: No, I had access all right, in the sense that I could walk in and see him. You know, that reminds me of Mel Laird. Mel Laird was in the Nixon White House, and Mel and I appeared on a talk show down in Chicago, shortly after Mel had left the White House, the [Irv] Kupcinet show, and Kups said, "Did you have adequate access to the President?"

And Mel said, "Do you mean, could I go in and talk to him any time I wanted to? Sure. What good does it do me to go in and talk to a man that's not listening to me?" I could walk in and see Johnson any time I wanted to, but he wasn't listening to me, and he--you know, it was really funny, he looked upon public relations as an arcane art, something that was practiced by adepts, magi, or sorcerers or wizards, and he thought the whole process was to wave a wand and cross your eyes and cut the foot off of a rabbit jumping over a grave, or something like that, and wham, you were pope. That man was absolutely superstitious about public relations. There he is telling Salinger, now, "You've elected Kennedy." Boy, Salinger almost swallowed his cigar.

G: But I guess when I'm talking about access, I'm wondering about being present in important meetings when decisions--

R: Well, I'd go to all the meetings, yes. But that's not really where they--see, the decisions which they made in the meetings, were not really the meetings where they made the decisions. Decisions were made at some conference of his, which nobody would know about except the participants. Let's say him and McNamara and Rusk, or maybe Raborn would sit in on it or whatever, and that would be lunch. Then the next day you'd have the decision meeting. Well, the decision meeting was just a rubber stamp.

Even George Ball did very little at the big decision meetings. They'd go all around the table, every one of them telling the President how best to do what they thought he wanted to do. They'd come to Ball and Ball would say, "Well, you know my attitude, Mr. President. Do we really know where we're going?" I'd read stories in the papers, how Ball was opposed to this and opposed to that. I thought the man was a

phony. I discovered later on that's one of the few things the release of the Pentagon Papers actually did. I discovered that Ball really was counseling him with a remarkable set of memos [on] what was wrong in Vietnam. He just wasn't paying any attention.

We all tend to forget that the communication process is two ways. Somebody's got to talk and somebody's got to listen. He simply wasn't listening. Also I think the other thing, he loved to make a splash, and God, the opportunities that a president of the United States has to make a splash! Like sitting in a haystack and holding a press conference. Take the press for those walks around the South Lawn. Sign that bill at the Statue of Liberty, that sort of thing. That's what he was really looking at me for. He once told me that the job of the press secretary was to plan to get his name and picture in the paper. My God, my jaw almost bounced off the floor. Imagine having to plan to get the name of the president of the United States in the newspaper! Whew.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XXVI

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