

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 5, 1970
INTERVIEWEE: IVAN SINCLAIR
INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ
PLACE: Mr. Sinclair's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

F: Mr. Sinclair, you came out of Dimmitt, Texas, which is a long way from Washington and the White House. How did you gravitate into the life of Lyndon Johnson and national politics?

S: Well, it's a long story, Dr. Frantz, but I'll try to make it as short as possible. My primary interest in college was in journalism.

F: Where was this?

S: Hardin-Simmons University. And I was called to the service right after I got out of Hardin-Simmons; well, I say right after. I spent a year in Amarillo working for the newspaper.

F: Did you know the Hardin-Simmons journalism man that got killed in San Angelo?

S: I didn't know there was one.

F: I'll recognize his name, if I think about it.

S: Well, I'll be darned. I didn't know there was one.

But I applied to go to Columbia University while I was still in Hardin-Simmons, and through a quirk of fate, I never received word of my acceptance to go to the Graduate School of Journalism there. I went into the service for a six months period and still had an interest in going to Columbia, and later found out that I had

SINCLAIR -- I -- 2

received acceptance and it just hadn't reached me.

So I went the following year after I got out of the service. Let me say that previously to that, I had no interest in politics. I would have been lucky to have known my own congressman when I was at Dimmit, Texas. But while I was at the graduate school at Columbia, it was the year of the Kennedy-Nixon campaign, and 75 percent of the students in my class were from Ivy League schools and they, in fact, considered me quite provincial. So I felt that I had to overcome that. So I became very interested--through forcing myself and through, the same time, enjoying it--in national issues. And that was the only topic of conversation that year.

While there, I felt that I should also learn a little bit about my home state, having been there eighteen years in high school, and then four years in college, and still feeling pretty stupid when I left there. So I studied, and I learned that Lyndon Johnson truly had been one of the leaders in Texas for many years.

After I got out of Columbia, I had a yearning to go to Washington, because I felt--it's an old trite saying that you hear very often now--that was where the action was in politics. So I began to work for Leslie Carpenter, who still is a correspondent in Washington for several newspapers.

F: Including the Austin American-Statesman.

S: Right. Mrs. Carpenter was already working for then Vice President Lyndon Johnson. I was working for Les for five months and got recalled to the service. Immediately prior to my getting out of

SINCLAIR -- I -- 3

the service the second time, I wrote to Les, and I said that I've always had, or in the past few years I've had an inclination to try to work for, well, preferably Vice President Johnson. And I said, "Instead of firing that guy that you hired to replace me in order to rehire me, why don't you see if you can get me an appointment through Liz, or whatever method that you can, with the Vice President." He wrote back and said that, then, Walter Jenkins would be available and would love to talk to me. So I took a three-day pass from Fort Stewart, Georgia; came to Washington; and, indeed, he needed someone just at the moment that I came.

F: Walter did.

S: Right. Well, the Vice President on the staff that Walter hired for him. That was, to make a long story even longer, I guess, how I got interested in it and how I became a member of his staff.

F: Now, what's our date, approximately?

S: I'm horrible on dates. It was in 1962, I guess, of August. I began work in September.

F: What did you do, mainly, besides stand around and learn?

S: My chief mentors were Walter and Cliff Carter. I started off the way anyone starts off, handling correspondence.

F: Writing warm, friendly letters?

S: Warm and friendly letters to politicians all over the United States, with a lot of guidance from both of those individuals. I later started doing a lot of the advance work for LBJ on the various political trips, as well as trips that were not classified political.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 4

F: Did you get in on any of the foreign trips?

S: No foreign trips. Strictly domestic.

F: Domestic.

S: But I gravitated more and more toward that, doing a lot of the setting up of the arrangements in the various cities that he'd be going to, working with local politicians, et cetera.

F: Did you run into any particular problems on that?

S: As Vice President, or as an advance man for a Vice President, I found it to be much, much more difficult than we later discovered after he became President.

F: There's a little less enthusiasm.

S: Considerably less enthusiasm. I found, one, that fewer Secret Service agents, at that point, went out ahead to help you with the logistical arrangements. And you worked glove-in-hand with the Secret Service agents, because they had to know what you were setting up and vice versa. We had to scrounge material sometimes, and we would always have to find a person willing to assist us in what we were doing, and sometimes we had to go out and search for these people, while he was Vice President. After he became President, I can say that this changed immediately.

F: Did you run into that feeling that is always expressed about Vice Presidents, that is, "Is Lyndon Johnson still alive?" sort of thing?

S: I really can't say that we did, and perhaps this was due in no small part to planning where he went. Of course, I don't know the number of invitations that he received, but the

SINCLAIR -- I -- 5

number of acceptances to the number of invitations would probably be a hundred to one, or something like that. The places that we went, they did want him there. In every instance, I can say that.

F: He went on invitation, not . . . ?

S: Yes, sir.

F: Was there some kind of a rule of thumb, or loose formula, on how many you would accept, or did you just go where it seemed to be a good idea at the moment?

S: We just went where it seemed to be most appropriate at the time.

F: Do you think that, from your vantage point, did he seem to clear these with the President himself, so that they wouldn't get signals mixed?

S: I'll just say that he would not be in conflict. They were aware of one another's schedules.

F: But he pretty well had his own initiative, so long as it didn't get in the way of something coming up?

S: Yes, sir. That is true. The checking would occur to see if there were no conflict.

F: And you, I know, got mixed up in one that later surfaced, and that was the dinner for Senator Thomas Dodd.

S: Yes, sir. I guess you could call me the desk man in Washington. I

SINCLAIR -- I -- 6

didn't actually go out and advance it myself, but I coordinated the advance from Washington.

F: What happened as far as your participation is concerned, or anything else you know about firsthand?

S: I worked with Senator Dodd's staff members and with the principal individuals that we sent out from Washington on the advance. They would call me periodically throughout the day; and I would check with various individuals on Senator Dodd's staff to see if indeed his schedule would dovetail with that of the Vice President, did he want him there at a certain time, and try . . . I was the liaison, you might say, more than anything else, not establishing any matters of policy as to when he would be at a particular point but feeding information from Dodd's staff to the Vice President, or to Walter Jenkins, or whoever might be involved in it; getting okays from both sides, and then proceeding with the advance work.

F: Was there some problem as far as . . . I mean, did the President suspect that he might be euchred into a situation that would give him trouble?

S: It is my firm belief that he did not suspect that. In fact, I think everyone was well aware that he had been friends with Senator Dodd for quite some period and Senator Dodd asked him to appear strictly to benefit his campaign. That was the basis on which he accepted.

F: Now, the Vice President was pretty quick to go to the aid of a friend, wasn't he?

SINCLAIR -- I -- 7

S: Yes, sir. I'm sure you've discovered this, and that's the one characteristic I can say about President Johnson that stands out above all others. He was almost fanatically loyal to his friends. And as far as I know, that still is his way.

F: Whom did you work with, J. P. Boyd?

S: Boyd and a fellow by the name of Gartland. They called him Judge Gartland. He was on his staff also. But I worked with both primarily. Boyd, of course, was in Washington. Gartland actually went out into the state and helped our people advance.

F: There wasn't any suspicion whatsoever that this might cause you trouble?

S: On anyone's part. I can say that we thought that he was strictly going for the benefit of the Senator's campaign. As to the manner of disbursement of the funds that were raised for that event, I guess he just trusted Dodd implicitly. That's the only thing I can say.

F: You would give Dodd's staff a clean bill of health on this, too?

S: I'll put it this way. They didn't try to mislead us, to my knowledge. Now, maybe . . . Well, I'd better just leave it at that.

F: Yes. Did you ever run into any real snafus in any of these advance trips, or did you eventually get everything to work out?

S: Oh, I think, in every instance, they worked out. Of course, the only real snafus that could have occurred would have been logistically. As far as politically, or hurt feelings on various individuals' parts, I can think of no instance that would stand out.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 8

- F: Did you ever get the feeling that local people who issued invitations were not as careful of the Vice President's position as they might should have been?
- S: I think this is true in almost any instance that you go to. There is always a person in every city who, whether he is running for office or not, is trying to build his own little power base. I can't point out specific instances, but I think this is generally true, that they will invite people that, had you been doing the invitations yourself, you would not have invited.
- F: I seem to be off on the questionable ones which I had no intention to, but these things work sometimes. Did you have any idea at all that Billy Sol Estes was going sour?
- S: No, I didn't, and fortunately for me, I remained completely in the dark on that.
- F: You had no relationship?
- S: None at all.
- F: What about the revelations on Bobby Baker? Did you get to see the Vice President's reaction to those?
- S: I think his reaction was one of disappointment. He, as everyone knows and as the newspaper and magazine articles very carefully pointed out, was very close to Bobby Baker.
- F: Yes. And a number of other people.
- S: And the Vice President readily acknowledged that.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 9

F: Right.

S: And he was disappointed in his actions.

F: Did you know Baker personally?

S: Just slightly. I had some dealing with him while he was . . .

F: Now, did these revelations come as a surprise to people like Walter Jenkins and George Reedy?

S: I think it probably did to Walter Jenkins. But I had, I must say, formed my own impression of Bobby Baker, and they did not come as a surprise to me. (Laughter)

F: I see. You mean Walter believes a little more in innocence than you do?

S: I can't say that. But this may be--I realize that this Mr. Baker might have access to these someday . . .

F: Not if you say not.

S: . . . but I always thought that Bobby Baker had a degree of arrogance which I could not tolerate.

F: He knew the uses of power, too.

S: He certainly did.

F: Did you have any idea, from your position, that either the Baker or the Billy Sol Estes scandals hurt Johnson's relationship with President Kennedy?

S: No, I would have been in no position to judge that at all. I certainly think that they had a rub-off, a negative effect, on him, perhaps nationwide. I do not know to what degree. But people just suspected the wheeler-dealer image, and both of these certainly

SINCLAIR -- I -- 10

were classified as that.

F: Right.

S: In that category.

F: At your level, what was the feeling towards Johnson's chances of being continued on the ticket in '64?

S: Well, we just heard, like everyone else, many, many rumors to that effect.

F: It was just hall gossip and nothing else.

S: Yes, sir. A lot of gossip, but nothing concrete.

F: Did you have much relationship with the Kennedy staff?

S: Some with Ken O'Donnell he was the primary liaison.

F: Was he pretty good to work with?

S: From my standpoint, he was, yes, sir.

F: Fairly accessible?

S: He was responsive any time we called.

F: If you needed to get together with the Kennedy people, you could get some action?

S: Yes, sir.

F: And so you weren't frozen?

S: No. At least, I never experienced it, and those I worked with never expressed a feeling in that regard.

F: Did you work on the fateful trip to Dallas in November of '63?

S: No, ironically enough, I was advancing a trip that very day, in fact, for then-Vice President Johnson to New York. I was in New York with Secret Service agents for the big B'nai B'rith meeting at Madison

SINCLAIR -- I -- 11

Square Garden, and I was on another advance trip while they were on the trip to Dallas.

F: Where were you when it took place?

S: Well, I was . . .

F: Probably at lunch.

S: People never forget that. I was at the Russian Tea Room on 57th Street in New York, with, then the president of the American Jewish Congress . . .

F: And a bowl of borscht?

S: . . . and with a Secret Service agent. And as we left the Russian Tea Room and got into the Secret Service agent's car, he received a call from their headquarters in New York [that] said, "Check in every thirty minutes."

F: You didn't pick it up on the radio?

S: We didn't pick it up immediately. But his reaction, immediately, was, "My God, that's unprecedented. Something must be up." We started driving down 57th Street and we stopped at a red light; a taxi pulled up beside of us and there was a woman in the back seat leaning over the taxi driver's head, with her head out the driver's side window, just sobbing. She screamed out, said, "The President has been shot." And the Secret Service agent, then, of course, we just headed as fast as we could to the headquarters in Lower Manhattan. And he had a portable radio; he said, "Get that radio out, and we'll get the

SINCLAIR -- I -- 12

news accounts."

F: How did the rest of your day go?

S: Well, I spent a considerable amount of time in the Secret Service headquarters in New York, to try to get accurate reports on it; then I immediately called the president of the American Jewish Congress and told him, of course, that all plans were off. He responded, said, "We do plan to go ahead with it. Can we have a telegram from--" he said, "President Johnson." And I said, "I'm sure that can be arranged." And then I, later that afternoon, got on a flight back to Washington.

F: Just a regular commercial flight.

S: Yes, sir.

F: What did you run into when you got back? Did you go straight to the EOB, or where?

S: Yes, sir. Organized chaos, I guess, would be the best way to phrase it.

F: Who was there?

S: Walter Jenkins was the primary person who was coordinating things from this end.

F: Did Walter have things somewhat under control?

S: Yes, sir.

F: In an uncontrolled situation?

S: He really did.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 13

F: Was he working with the Kennedy people then?

S: Oh, he was on the phone, of course, frequently back and forth to Dallas, as well as to Air Force One on the way back.

F: The plane was aloft by the time you got back?

S: Yes, sir. Well, I couldn't even begin to enumerate the people that he was talking to, friends of long standing for LBJ, as well as with the Kennedy people.

F: Physically, what did you do the next few days?

S: Spent the time in EOB, just frankly doing anything I could to assist. Of course, the office was inundated with telegrams and letters of condolence, best wishes for LBJ, et cetera. Well, in working with so many politicians, in correspondence and the telephone while I was with him while he was Vice President, I had gotten to know many of his friends; I'm sorry to say I volunteered for a task I wish I had never volunteered for. I said, "These have got to be sorted out. The people who should receive answers immediately should receive them." I talked to Walter about it and I said, "I'll undertake this if you want me to," and I did.

F: You worked around the clock.

S: And I immediately became just swamped with correspondence, but we did try to get out--

F: You had no trouble getting the White House pool to work for you?

S: No, sir. In fact, well, as you know, they have a correspondence section at the White House, and Mr. Hopkins, who's still at the White House, was the single most cooperative, helpful

SINCLAIR -- I -- 14

person I have yet to work with. He will always stand out in my mind. I'm not sure what his title is now. He was executive clerk at the White House, at that point.

F: He's what makes it go.

S: Nothing ruffled him. We could call him; he would say, "It should be done this way. You can do it, or you can do it this way, and . . ."

F: Well, you had certain advantages in that you had been at least on the near periphery of what had been going on, but you still hadn't been at the center.

S: That's correct.

F: So I presume you had to lean pretty heavily. You must have had some questions arise that you didn't know how to handle, or where to go to get them handled.

S: I forget who directed me to Mr. Hopkins, but once I found that man, the problems seemed to resolve themselves. I forget how many transitions in administrations he has seen, but it dated back several administrations.

F: He goes back at least to Hoover.

S: I believe that's correct.

F: About '28 or '29.

S: He said, "This is the way we can do it." That's generally the way he would state it. Actually, the staff members who had not worked with him--I'm speaking of the LBJ staff--it was simply a matter of saying, "You lead; we'll follow."

F: Yes. Anything come up you couldn't handle?

SINCLAIR -- I -- 15

- S: Not to my knowledge. Speaking individually, I relied on him. There's nothing that came up that we could not resolve. I'll put it that way.
- F: That the two of you couldn't handle, if he could handle it.
- S: Right.
- F: In a situation like that, a real national tragedy, do the seekers who are, of course, legion wait for the body to cool before they start in on the new President?
- S: No, sir.
- F: They start immediately.
- S: Immediately. Almost heartbreaking to see some of the telegrams and letters that you receive in a period like that.
- F: What, just asking for things? Or jubilant?
- S: Asking for things. And some people were even crass enough to say, "Glad it happened. You're finally where you should be."
- F: No taste.
- S: Complete lack of taste, lack of tact and diplomacy, whatever you wish to say. Or I even went farther than that: complete lack of feeling.
- F: When the President got back, did he come over to the EOB?
- S: Yes, sir.
- F: Did he have some sort of a staff meeting?
- S: He went right into appointments. As I recall, Ambassador [Henry Cabot] Lodge was there, and he immediately had an appointment with

SINCLAIR -- I -- 16

him. And as I recall, he went into immediate meetings with various members of his staff, not calling them all in at once, but as he saw things to get done, he called in a staff member to get it done for him. And, of course, he was on the phone frequently himself.

F: Yes. Did he ever sort of send down word that he wanted you to stay on, or did he just take for granted that you would?

S: I think he just took that for granted.

F: And you worked.

S: Yes, sir.

F: Did you go home that night?

S: As I recall, I think I did go home about three or four o'clock. I came back very early the next morning.

F: Did you get involved at all in the funeral?

S: No, sir.

F: Was that handled entirely on the Kennedy side?

S: That was handled by the Kennedy side, and also by Colonel Jackson who was the military aide to then the Vice President, and who stayed on for a certain period thereafter. He worked with the Kennedy people, to a certain degree, on the logistical arrangements.

F: Well, now, how did your duties shift, now that you're working for a President instead of a Vice President?

S: Just a little more hectic. The essential type of duties remained the same.

F: What was your precise title? Not that that matters.

S: Staff assistant.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 17

F: And it remained that.

S: Yes, sir.

F: In your organizational line, were you pretty much attached to Walter Jenkins?

S: Yes, sir. Jenkins, and again, to Cliff Carter. I still worked closely with both of them.

F: Well, did you pick up any of the idea that the President might not run in '64?

S: No, sir. (Laughter) I did not. He made a liar out of me, I guess. I said that the man has too much pride not to [in '68].

F: Did you get involved in the election? Which is an obvious question.

S: Well, all of us did.

F: What did you do, as far as the actual campaign is concerned?

S: An organization called the Young Citizens for Johnson and Humphrey was established, and I was, well, I guess you might call it the White House liaison with this organization. I knew Marvin Watson very well and worked closely with him. Of course, Marvin, at that time, was at the Democratic National Committee.

F: Yes.

S: Cliff Carter went over to the Committee and continued just very close liaison with them, but I was particularly active with the Young Citizens for Johnson and Humphrey organization.

F: Did you continue to advance trips?

S: Yes. Not as many during the campaign, because we implemented a very large campaign organization, of course, as anyone does. And I

SINCLAIR -- I -- 18

continued to work primarily in Washington but worked with the Young Citizens organization plus the day-to-day activities of the White House. This was not even the majority of my time with this organization.

F: Okay, you've got an intolerable load as any good White House person has already. Now, when you had a campaign on top of that, how do you manage to get the work done?

S: Very little sleep and very little family life, unfortunately.

F: Were you married?

S: Yes, sir.

F: Children?

S: At that point, I had . . .

F: This is '64.

S: At that point, I had no children.

F: Yes. So you didn't have the problem of never seeing them.

The Walter Jenkins disclosure. Did you get any idea firsthand of how that hit the President?

S: A shock to him.

F: Where were you when this came out?

S: Let's see. I was at home when I first heard about it.

F: This wasn't one of these things in which there had been intimations at a lower level, and everybody knew it but the President?

S: No, sir.

F: I mean this was a--

S: No, sir. It was a shock to everybody.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 19

F: It took everybody.

S: It really did.

F: What did you do? Get down to the office then?

S: I did, in fact, because it took everybody by, well, surprise is the least strong word a person could use on that.

F: I'm sure it was really traumatic.

S: I had--well, I won't even say had, still do have the highest respect for Walter Jenkins. I considered him to be one of the most capable men I have ever worked with or for, but if there's ever a person who bore an intolerable load, he did.

F: Yes. He just tried to do it all himself.

S: I think the President expected him to do it all. He was fortunately or, as it turned out, unfortunately, one of those men who could do it all. But he would be in the office at two o'clock in the morning, go home, get a few hours' sleep, be back by seven o'clock in the morning, still going strong. And the President, while he was Vice President and President, not only did he confide in Walter on things of his responsibilities as Vice President or President, but he was a personal confidant as well. I'm sure that Mr. Jenkins--well, everybody called him Walter, but out of respect you called him Mr. Jenkins--had so little time to immerse himself in his own problems because he was so involved in those of the President.

F: Did the staff more or less kind of square its shoulder and resolve to pick right on up?

S: I would say, yes.

SINCLAIR -- I-20

- F: Did Walter come back? He went right to the hospital, didn't he?
- S: Yes, sir. Directly.
- F: So that there wasn't any phase out to this?
- S: No, sir.
- F: Over with just like a curtain drawn?
- S: It certainly was.
- F: Was the staff fearful of what would happen as far as the campaign was concerned, or was it considered that the American public would take that in its stride?
- S: Well, I guess the initial reaction to anything like this . . .
- F: The timing, you know.
- S: Right. We felt that it might have an effect, but it was soon apparent that it wouldn't.
- F: This was just a casualty of service.
- S: I've even forgotten the headlines that day, but there were two or three major events that relegated this to a small position on the front page. The timing, well, the timing, whenever it could have occurred was unfortunate, but as far as it making a big splash across the country--
- F: It wasn't the story of the day.
- S: It wasn't the story of the day, which was fortunate.
- F: Okay, everybody's over his head in work already, and suddenly you remove the key man. How do you parcel out all he's been doing? Or do you lose something in the process?

SINCLAIR -- I -- 21

S: I think we probably did lose something in the process. At the same time, Walter was not close-mouthed about what he was doing. He knew what he was doing, and the President himself was able to assign responsibilities that Walter had been doing. Walter, too, had a very capable staff. In fact, I don't know if you've talked to Mrs. [Mildred] Stegall yet, but she carried much of the load for Walter and she continued to do so.

F: Did this shift your duties any, besides just give you more to do?

S: Just a little more to do.

F: Did you go to Atlantic City?

S: Yes, sir.

F: What did you do there?

S: We had special events planned for the Young Citizens all during the convention, and I helped coordinate that.

F: At that time, you really didn't have any sort of a youth gap, did you?

S: At that time, we did not. That's quite true.

F: You think this was largely because of the Johnson record of that period, or because of his opposition, or combination or what?

S: I think it was a combination of several things. There was, I do feel, almost a universal respect for the way LBJ picked up the reins and guided the country during that period. And as a result, the people had no [resentment]; I won't say the people in general, I know some did have some resentment. But they had respect for what he had done and the way he had handled himself after the

SINCLAIR -- I -- 22

assassination. For that feeling, there was great empathy with him.

And that was true of the young people as well as the old.

F: After the assassination and for the first year, Johnson merged his own previous staff with the Kennedy staff he inherited.

S: Yes, sir.

F: Did those two teams mesh fairly well?

S: Maybe mesh is the wrong word. There was a respect. There was more a respect for one another's individual capabilities, rather than an overriding spirit of cooperation. But we respected one another, we, for what they could do, and them, for what we could do, and I feel worked quite well together as a result.

F: Did the Kennedy people sort of accept Walter Jenkins as the chief of staff, in effect?

S: Well, I had no specific instances to relate that would indicate that they didn't. You would hear undercurrents that they would resent it. But that's only natural, I would think.

F: Yes, well, they had the rug pulled out from under them.

S: Yes, sir. Under tragic circumstances.

F: I know what you feel any time your group goes out and another one comes in, even if you can anticipate.

S: That's correct. If there were any feelings of resentment, they were totally understandable feelings, as far as I was concerned.

F: But there wasn't any . . . You didn't have the feeling of two staffs there, then?

S: No.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 23

F: From that time forward?

S: No. In fact, the key Kennedy people, I think, probably bent over backwards to be cooperative during that period.

F: Was there a feeling among some of the Johnson people that he ought to get rid of some of the Kennedy people?

S: Oh, very candidly, of course there was.

F: Were they specific about it, or did they just feel it as a general principle?

S: I think as a general principle.

F: Just bring in his own people?

S: Just bring in his own team.

F: Well, looking back, do you think it was a good idea to keep them on?

S: For that period, I think it was. This is purely speaking personally on this, but I feel that he could have brought in his own people much sooner than he did and to a greater degree than he did.

F: Did you kind of discern a reluctance on his part to tell people goodbye?

S: Yes, sir. Very definitely. It was almost a lifetime commitment with the man.

F: So that if you worked for him he sort of wanted you to stay?

S: Maybe hurt is too strong a word, but I feel that he was hurt when a person that had worked closely with him left him. He felt, maybe he would think, that you were deserting a sinking ship, so to speak.

F: How long did you stay with him?

S: Three years, altogether.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 24

F: You stayed through that period. I would presume that during '64, all during '64, there was a sort of intoxication in the air around the staff that you were getting things done. Did you get the feeling that the Kennedy people appreciated the way he was driving home some of the programs?

S: That's a difficult question to answer.

F: They're opinion questions, I realize, but we've had plenty of Kennedy opinions on that. (Laughter)

S: I'm sure that's true. I think they felt that he had to, and I think the President felt that he had to. If you recall, the first speech that he gave to the joint session after that, that he would see these programs through, and he committed himself on that day to do so. In fact, I stayed at the White House the day that he gave that address to the joint session. But then, for his next address to the joint session, I was standing in the back with some of the Kennedy people in the back of the chamber. I, of course, listened to their comments and their comments were positive on what he said he hoped to enact.

F: Did he find them fairly useful in legislative liaison?

S: Yes, I think . . .

F: I mean, could they touch a certain group that maybe he wasn't so close to?

S: Yes. Anyone that comes into that type of office, that is to say anyone that comes into the presidency, of course, has his own following; he has his contacts in the House or the Senate. But everyone, I think,

SINCLAIR -- I -- 25

would recognize the abilities of Larry O'Brien, and Larry did prove to be an extremely valuable ally with the Congress. His contacts, I'd say, dovetailed very well with those that the President himself had.

F: Did you get the feeling, in the case of people like O'Brien, and Mac Bundy, and so on, that the President accepted their wholehearted loyalty as pros?

S: I know he did for those two people, specifically, yes.

F: In other words, they were going to serve a President.

S: Yes, sir.

F: And Johnson happened to be the President.

S: Yes, sir.

F: Did you have any particular insight to his relationship with Bill Moyers?

S: I had known Bill when Mr. Johnson was Vice President, [but] not well. I had not known him that closely.

F: That was when he was with the Peace Corps.

S: Yes, sir. And again, this is purely personal, but I think the President did sort of look upon Bill like a son. Bill had done extremely well, was extremely bright.

F: Had some of the same drive.

S: He had done this somewhat under the direction of LBJ, and he took pride in Bill's accomplishments.

F: What do you think happened to the two people?

S: I think there was a parting of sympathies.

F: Why?

SINCLAIR -- I -- 26

S: Well, on this, I hope that Mr. Moyers never has access to, but I think Bill became too personally ambitious. The President liked to see people excel, but in their excelling, his interests had to be paramount because they were on his staff, and he was President. And I thought it was an entirely fair guideline for him, that if a person was excelling, I won't say against his interests, but it certainly did not help him by doing it, he justifiably resented it. I think this: perhaps Bill went one step over the mark on this.

F: Why did you leave?

S: I just got tired of the long hours and never seeing my family. In fact, I did later get divorced, and I attribute a lot of it, a lot of it, 99 percent of it, to the life I had led since becoming married.

F: Is there a sort of high casualty rate, in a sense? I'm sure you miss some congeniality, at least, by never being home. It must be an awfully difficult job for a wife, in a sense.

S: It is. Well, anyone who has worked in such a position will tell you that their wives aren't understanding of it, and you can understand where a wife cannot be understanding of never seeing her husband, or only seeing him during the--

F: Get trotted out on occasion.

S: --hours of darkness. I do remember one specific instance on this. I had never met President Kennedy while LBJ was Vice President and I looked forward to the day of meeting President Kennedy, but I came home after being away from Washington for ten days

SINCLAIR -- I -- 27

to two weeks--I forget precisely how long--and my wife, during that period, had come down with pleurisy and was very sick in bed. I went home after the trip, and, as I recall, I was only home about half a day, went home early after the trip. The next day I was in the Executive Office Building. I was walking across the street to the White House, I forget for what reason I was going over. I met the Vice President coming back from the White House, and he said, "Ivan, I would like for you to go with me to West Palm Beach tomorrow. I'm going to meet with President Kennedy and I want you to go with me." That's the only time I ever just said no. I said, "Mr. Vice President, my wife is sick. She was sick while I was gone, and I just can't do it." Frankly, I found myself in the doghouse for a few weeks thereafter because I had not gone. It was a loyalty that he demanded of his staff, and if you fell short of it, well, I'll say I don't know if he was hurt or not, but he just expected it of you.

F: He didn't expect you to say no.

S: No, sir.

F: Did the staff work continue at about the same level after Walter Jenkins left, or did you have a feeling there was some decline in the effectiveness of the staff?

S: Oh, I couldn't really make a judgment on that. I don't think there was any decline.

F: You don't think, you wouldn't buy the premise I've heard some people advance that part of LBJ's difficulties after '65, '66, stemmed from the fact that he didn't have Walter Jenkins as someone who could

SINCLAIR -- I -- 28

F: talk straight to him.

S: Well, that's a premise I have heard, too. There's some basis to it.

F: Things would have been brought to his attention that weren't otherwise.

S: Yes. I'm sure that you have read some of the articles that George Reedy has written, and I must say that I agree with many of the things that George has said: that it is difficult for a man in the presidency to find people who will say no. And Walter did have that capability, because he was such a close confidant.

F: Many a time he was the only person who could have said no.

S: That's right.

F: And gotten away with it.

S: And there are times when a person needs to say no in the worst way, or if not say no, at least present all of these options. Now, Mac Bundy was superb at presenting all the options. That was his responsibility; I think he did it quite well, because he represented the pros and cons and let the President make the decision. But as far as if he had a strong feeling on something, I think that he would probably have been reluctant to say, "No, you can't do this," or "You should not do this." He would present both sides and let the President make the decision. Of course, there are those who would say that's precisely the way it should be done.

F: Did you go with Braniff, then, when you left the White House?

S: No. When the President appointed Lloyd Hand as chief of protocol, I had known Lloyd while I was on LBJ's staff; and Lloyd, in effect, said, "Are you tired of the rat race? I think I have something to

SINCLAIR -- I -- 29

offer you that would be highly attractive." And the way he presented it, it was highly attractive. And I said, "I am so damned tired of it."

F: What did you do then?

S: I became his public affairs officer; handled the press for him individually and for the visiting dignitaries that came to the U.S. while he was chief of protocol; did a lot of travel, both domestically and internationally, the international portion that I would never have done otherwise. It was an opportunity to broaden my horizons.

F: Did that present you with any particular problems insofar as the President was concerned?

S: No, it didn't. I'll admit a reluctance to say, "Goodbye," but I tried to couch it in words where he would not be offended.

F: Did you tell him personally?

S: Yes, sir, and told him it would be an opportunity to still serve him; [that] was the key element. And I think that we still had a very close relationship with the White House. Lloyd personally did, and of course, I had been associated with it for three years, and it was very valuable for us to have that relationship in the office of the Chief of protocol.

F: The protocol office is sort of ambivalent position, in a sense. He's State Department. He's also very much the chief White House person.

S: That is correct.

F: Does that create certain problems of jurisdiction, or serving two masters?

S: I don't think it did in Lloyd's instance at all. Perhaps there,

SINCLAIR -- I -- 30

again, headiness enters into it. There might have been some resentment of his close relationship with the White House from State Department individuals, but I can certainly relate no specific instances to prove that point. But it was just a feeling that was prevalent.

F: Did Lloyd work well with Dean Rusk?

S: Yes, sir.

F: Is the Secretary involved in this to a great extent?

S: Only to the degree that, well, setting up conferences, luncheons, dinners, et cetera, with visiting chiefs, heads of government, or chiefs of state.

F: Did you have any particular information problems?

S: No, sir.

F: You could handle that pretty straightforwardly?

S: Yes, sir.

F: When you have a somewhat less than friendly country, how do you handle the press for that sort of an arrangement?

S: Well, of course, you cooperate very, very closely with the embassy, our embassy in the country from whence the person would be coming. And there are some career people at the State Department who you can rely on heavily in instances like this and their counsel is always good. I personally worked very closely with the press office of the White House.

F: You had an advantage there.

S: Yes, sir.

F: Did you get involved in the Kosygin visit?

SINCLAIR -- I -- 31

S: No, thank goodness. (Laughter)

F: So you didn't have to work that one out, huh?

I want to shift this a little bit. You went with Braniff, which is just an incidental in what I'm going to ask, but it leads up to something that you've had a special view on. In '68, you will recall that Braniff as well as another airline received a trans-Pacific air route and that President Nixon rescinded it. Now then, the point I'd like to get at is: does the President, can the President, exert any pressure for that sort of grounding, or is this a matter of cold economics, or is it a matter of how much is he granting such fruits as a matter of politics. As always, you know, everybody sees favoritism in everything. And because Braniff was, one, Texas-based and two, because there were at least interrelationships of Braniff people as well as Braniff finances with the Johnson group, was any favoritism shown? I realize I'm asking a Braniff man that question.

S: Well, I was working, as I say, for the last three years prior to my coming back to Washington, in what is called public affairs. That includes governmental affairs. We worked, I'd rather say diligently rather than closely, with the Civil Aeronautics Board and with congressmen, senators, et cetera. Every airline plays it much the same way. They do. Whether pressure can be applied or not, the airline representatives, including attorneys, do work with congressmen and with senators to see if they can, if anything, come up with ideas that they might have missed in their own presentations. Now, if you

SINCLAIR -- I -- 32

make a judgment as to whether politics entered into it or not, I think any regulatory agency in government in which there are appointees, in most instances political appointees, you can never completely separate them from politics . . .

F: Right.

S: . . . by the pure nature of the beast. And in that regard, at least, you can say that politics is played. You call on your friends; you ask if there are ways they can be of assistance. Maybe there aren't, but you ask if there are. And it's well known that it is done, of course. Now, as to whether there was favoritism shown in this instance, I like to believe that there was not. We made a very specific case for our area of the country.

F: You try to keep some geographic balance, don't you?

S: Yes, sir. I think you need a little background on this. In a major case, every airline that is interested comes in and asks for everything; and then there is a weeding out process from there. Now, after the examiner's decision came out, we had a meeting in Dallas, and we determined what we could realistically seek and hope to obtain, based on the pure practicalities of it.

F: If you got all you asked for originally, you'd be embarrassed.

S: That's right. That's literally true. And so we defined the geographic area that we thought would pertain to Braniff that we could adequately serve, and that's precisely what we wound up with.

F: Well, now, conversely then, would you say that the rescinding of that

SINCLAIR -- I -- 33

permit by the incoming administration was a matter of politics?

S: I think it had to enter into it. I certainly do. Now, as to what pressures, if any, were applied, I certainly wouldn't be privy to them. But I can't help but have the feeling that President Nixon did want to enter into it, perhaps for political purposes, and I underline the perhaps. And as far as his being able to enter into it, there's much speculation [that] has come on that, but I think there was simply a miscalculation of days that enabled him to do it. If President Johnson had been able to act just one or two days sooner, President Nixon would have had no occasion to enter the case.

F: It would all have been certified and over.

S: That's right. I also have a strong feeling, and many others share it with me, that he probably wishes he never had gotten into it, after he did it.

F: That brings up something else. Two or three instances like this Braniff case, not effecting airlines, but one of the reasons I think he got at cross purposes with Udall at the end on this matter of setting aside land was that no action was taken by the time that Udall thought it ought to be taken.

S: Yes, sir.

F: Did the President, despite the fact that he's sort of in at nine, out at five man, at times show a reluctance to make certain decisions?

S: Oh, I don't think you could say that. If he felt that there were a decision that was indeed vital to the needs of the country, he would make that decision when it had to be made. Who can say

SINCLAIR -- I -- 34

whether the rewarding of a route to an airline is vital to the needs of the country?

F: Right. Right.

S: But if something [was] effecting the strategic interests of the country, he was in no way reluctant to make such a decision as that and make it when it had to be made. But I think, in anyone's sorting out of priorities, you could not say that which airline serves what area of the country is going to effect the country strategically, immediately at least. Truly, over the long range, it could have economic impact upon the country, but I don't think that was of primary interest at that time.

F: Right. Right. Looking back on your White House career, if you had the chance to repeat it, would you have taken on the same set of duties that you had?

S: Of course, everyone would like to live their life over. I would have sought more experience outside the White House before I got into White House activity, frankly. I felt that I was . . .

F: You mean, you did your learning at too high a level.

S: I did. It was on-the-job training. You had to learn. You have probably heard several people say and I repeat it with emphasis that LBJ was a perfectionist. He expected perfection from his staff.

F: Did he ever give you unexpected assignments just because you happened to come down the hall at the wrong time?

S: Yes. sir. He was a master at that. And I know of two or three times, when I would find myself working diligently, long hours on something,

SINCLAIR -- I -- 35

call somebody else up to get a little piece of information, and they'd say, "My God, I'm working on that, too." And you might find three people working on it. I guess he considered it the shotgun approach and he could take the best hit.

F: Did you get in on any of his speech writing?

S: Very little. I did write some.

F: Was it along any particular line, or just whatever came up?

S: Whatever. This occurred on a trip while he was Vice President. He had a speech prepared for the National Rural Electrification Association--I'm not sure if it's association. . .

F: It's REA.

S: . . . in Las Vegas, and we went out a couple of days in advance. In fact, this was the only time I had ever known him to go out a couple of days in advance, but he actually relaxed for about a day and a half prior to his giving the speech.

F: Where? In one of the Las Vegas hotels?

S: Yes, sir. But we arrived there and he studied the speech a little, and he decided he didn't like it. He told me to rewrite it, on the spot.

F: I see. That's-- (Laughter)

S: I did, I did, on the spot.

F: Did he take your version?

S: Yes, sir.

F: Was he fairly generous with praise when you did something he liked?

S: He had a characteristic that I have yet to encounter in any other man.

SINCLAIR -- I -- 36

He could make a person feel like he was on top of the mountain in one instance, and the next instance, he would feel like he was at the bottom of the valley. But I don't think he ever bore a grudge, if you did something wrong as a staff member, because you did have a chance to rectify it. I've pointed out an instance where I felt I was in the doghouse for a while. Well, I didn't feel it; I knew I was. I got the cold shoulder for a while.

F: What did you do: just ease out of it, or was it just one day over, or what?

S: It was over, usually, very fast. But he would chew you out royally and he was a master at it, but two days later he could make you feel like you were really something special.

F: The Johnson irritation, when things went wrong, is sort of fabled. Did the people who were the targets of his irritation take it personally, or did they just kind of stand there? I know no one likes to be chewed out, but did they just sort of take it in stride, the way you take bad weather?

S: I think they had to. The first time it happens, it comes as a shock; because a person may think that he has done his darndest in a particular instance, and all of the sudden he gets chewed out for it.

F: There's no room for mechanical breakdowns or anything like that?

S: In his mind, there isn't, although they do occur occasionally. But I can recall one instance where the sound system was not quite up to par at a small meeting that he had, and it had been my responsibility to go over and set up the sound system and make sure it was functioning properly. And it wasn't. Somebody spoke up and said, "Can't hear you,

SINCLAIR -- I -- 37

S: Mr. Vice President." And he told me what he thought in front of everybody that was present.

It was at College Station, after a speech at Texas A & M. And on the way back, he fired me for one day. But Cliff Carter took me aside at that point and said, "Ivan, welcome to the club." Said, "Consider this a part of your responsibility as a staff member."

F: The remainder of the staff, the veterans on the staff, never looked down on you if you made a mistake?

S: No, sir. Well, I say . . .

F: I mean, as long as you didn't compound them.

S: If you didn't compound them and make repeated mistakes. He did expect you to be perfect, and if you were perfect, his best praise was no comment, really. We learned to expect that. If he said nothing, we knew things had gone well.

F: Did you feel, sometimes, that his chewing on some staff member was a substitute for showing his irritation to the public at large?

S: I think it was an escape valve.

F: Had a certain therapy for him.

S: Yes. (Laughter)

F: I see.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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