INTERVIEW II

DATE: JULY 22, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: FRANK STANTON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Dr. Stanton's office, New York City

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: You visited the President after his heart attack in 1955.

S: Oh, yes.

G: Can you describe your visit down there?

S: Well, my recollection is that he went--didn't that [heart attack] occur at George Brown's place, where, in Alexandria or something?

G: Yes, Middleburg, I think.

S: He spent a lot of time telling me about the complications of getting medical attention.

G: Was he in good spirits?

S: He was in good spirits. He was thankful that he'd been spared. That's about all I remember; I don't remember what--

G: Did he see this as a real setback in his political career, do you think? Was there any doubt that he would regain his health?

S: As I look back on that occasion, I don't recall that he did. I was up in Canada at the time it happened. My memory isn't too clear about how he was characterizing his own pattern of behavior. The reason it isn't clear is that events after that have colored my recollection

of that particular happening. I guess what I'm saying is I never thought anything could strike him down. It's that kind of--I didn't find him in any depressed mood or anything of that kind.

G: You went again to the Ranch, I think, in 1959, when Mexican President [Adolfo] Lopez Mateos was visiting the Ranch, and there was a reception or party for him. Do you recall that occasion?

S: I recall it, but that was such a madhouse, that weekend, that I don't remember anything that stands out very clearly in my mind.

G: Did he enlist your advice in any way on planning that visit?

S: No.

G: Did you ever give him any advice on pay television?

S: I'm sure I did, but I can't pinpoint it, and the reason I'm sure is that I bored everybody about cable and pay television and the changes that were coming. But I don't recall any specific counsel.

G: Did he seem to appreciate the changes, do you [think]?

S: My recollection of that is that he was more annoyed than appreciative.

G: Really?

S: Annoyed in the sense that having climbed one mountain, he had to climb another one. Those aren't his words, but I got the feeling that, you know, "What are you bringing this up for," because it's one more problem. But nothing beyond that.

G: How did it first occur to you that there were going to be some significant changes in television?

S: It was a gradual process, because we had a laboratory division in the company, and we were looking at a lot of the advanced technology and so forth, and it was almost as plain

as the nose on your face that something like this was going to happen. In the rural areas where they had poor service, it was a way to get service to them. In the highly built-up communities, it was a way to eliminate the electrical interference and the shadowing effect of tall buildings. In the middle-sized markets, I frankly didn't think it would go so fast. It's obvious why it would go in the two extremes, but it has surprised me at the way it's taken off in the middle-sized markets that I think are reasonably well served by conventional television. But I guess the lure of sports and movies--I'm sure Ted Turner would say the lure of twenty-four-hour news, but I think that's a secondary force--I think the main things were the availability of movies and the almost unlimited availability of sporting events from all over the country. And, you see, to put the company's money where my mouth was, I'd simply point out the fact that we, CBS, were the biggest cable operator in North America, but not in the United States. I went to Canada because I was sure that the government here would not allow us to go into the business, and that's the way it turned out. They blocked the door as far as we were concerned. In fact, once we got established in Canada, Canada threw us out. So we were shut out everyplace.

G: Did you also envision the satellite component of this type of thing, as well as just a cable hookup?

S: About the way I envisioned long distance telephone lines; not direct satellite broadcasting but [as] a distribution system.

G: Now, the Johnsons did purchase an interest in a cable company. Do you think that this may have been a result of his conversation with you?

S: Well, it might well have been. I didn't discourage him from doing that.

G: How about color TV? Did you talk with him about that, when it was a new concept?

S: Well, I talked to everybody about it who would listen, and so, I'm sure I did. But I don't recall anything that was--

G: Okay. How about the new station building, the new KTBC building in Austin. Did he seek your advice on that, what it should--

S: No.

G: What was the role of Walter Jenkins in the business side of Lyndon Johnson's operations?

S: Well, he was a quiet observer, but I don't recall many times when he participated when the President, Lyndon, was present. But he would call me from time to time and say that Mr. Johnson was anxious to know about this or to know about that, and in that sense he was a "gofer" or a carrier, but not an active kind of participant.

G: Now, you made an appearance in 1956 before Emanuel Celler's antitrust subcommittee on the House Judiciary Committee. Do you recall that?

S: I sure do.

G: Tell me about that.

S: [It was] here in New York City for five days. Well, Manny Celler had the mistaken idea that the networks were beating the affiliates over the head, and that there was collusion as far as the other networks were concerned; a lot of misconceptions. And I guess I was the only witness in our end of that testimony, and we went down to the Federal Building every morning and stayed down there all day and came back every evening, and that covered everything from our basic contracts with the stations and how we sold the time. And by the end of the week, oh, well before the end of the week, Celler was being very responsive to the testimony and in the end laudatory about the--it opened up a relationship that I had with Celler that persisted until his death.

So all I can say is that I didn't welcome it, but having to go through it, I decided I was really going to do the best job I could. The best way I can demonstrate, I think, the quality of the association [with Celler] is that the Sunday before the vote was taken in the House on my contempt citation on "The Selling of the Pentagon," Manny called me at home and told me that he had tried to help persuade Staggers to step aside--I didn't cover this when we talked before, did I?

G: No, none of it.

S: And I was most appreciative of the fact that he cared enough to call me at home on a Sunday morning. He called me to counsel me to find something to give to Celler [Staggers?], in effect, to break the logjam, because he was sure that I was going to be cited, and unless I threw in the towel, I would end up being sent to jail. And I said to him, "I don't know how you can give Harley Staggers anything. The First Amendment is either the First Amendment or it isn't. Do you have anything?" "No, no," he didn't, he said, "I'm just calling you as a friend, and I'm telling you that I did something on Friday that I've never done before in my life, and that is that I, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee and the ranking member of the House, I walked down the hall to see Harley Staggers on your behalf. I'm just, as a friend, asking you to find some way to get out of this, because he's going to send you to jail." Well, you couldn't ask for anything more gracious.

Later, after I retired and when I was an officer of the International Red Cross and chairman of the American Red Cross, Manny came in and sat over in that chair one day and said he wanted my help on handling a delicate question regarding Israel and the Red Cross in Geneva, and [he] talked with me very candidly about the problems that the Jews were having and so forth. You know, that kind of relationship grew entirely out of that

one hearing, because up until that time, I don't think he would have given me the time of day.

In fact, I did go to see him in New York before the hearings [in 1956], to try to find out what was bugging him. He had a counsel that was very negative toward not me, but toward the industry. I've forgotten his name. And Manny sat there that night--the only time I could see him was around eight-thirty or nine o'clock in the evening at his law firm--and he was in a miserable mood, and he said, "I'm going to cut you up like a hot knife in butter." Oh, he really was rough on me. So I went into that hearing, you know, thinking that I'd never come out with my testicles, and just gave him the story and tried to be as responsive as I could. And as I say, by the end of the week it was a very friendly relationship. Way off the track, as far as--

G: Interesting incident. Now, you did, at this early hearing, decline to give some confidential information to the committee, as I understand it.

S: Yes, I think I did.

G: Can you recall that and whether they pressed you?

S: No, I think it was confidential only in the competitive sense. It wasn't a First Amendment issue; it was a competitive, commercial [issue].

G: Did Lyndon Johnson have any involvement with that? Did he give you any advice, or did he give you any support?

S: No, I don't think I ever talked to him about it.

G: Okay. Now, the following year, in 1957, there was a proposal to exchange television programs with the Soviet Union, and this was something you apparently worked on with LBJ. Do you remember that?

S: Well, I made a proposal for--was that in connection with the first COMSAT [Communications Satellite]?

G: Let's see.

S: No, I don't recall any conversations with Lyndon about this.

G: Then, in the late fifties, CBS carried the highlights of the Sputnik hearings, the [Armed Services Committee] Preparedness Subcommittee hearings on Sputnik. Do you recall those hearings and Lyndon Johnson's role in them and what they did for his image?

S: No, but I remember some meetings in the--my recollection is on the second floor of either the old State Department Building or in the White House, in which there were discussions about [space]. But this was after Kennedy was in the White House, and Lyndon at that time was chairing a [space] committee, and he had Senator Bob Kerr there, I believe, and a couple of White House people, somebody from NASA, or if NASA wasn't in existence at that time--no, NASA was in existence. Anyway, we talked about going to the moon, and it was out of that meeting that that paragraph that's frequently quoted that Kennedy used about the decision to go to the moon, that grew out of a meeting that Lyndon chaired, that I was there [for]. But I don't remember Lyndon participating, that he got anything out of that himself, other than that he did the job that had to be done. But I always thought that Kennedy came out smelling very good when it was just really thrust upon him.

G: Do you recall who was responsible for pushing that policy on Kennedy?

S: Oh, I thought Lyndon was.

G: Really? Okay. I have a note here that in 1958 you arranged for LBJ to meet with Bill Paley. Any insights on the relationship between those two men?

S: Never felt that it was anything more than perfunctory either way. I don't think that the President ever found himself having any community of interest with Paley, and Paley, I think, didn't take Johnson seriously until he was president, and then I don't think--he wasn't disrespectful, but there wasn't any warmth or any--I think either one of them would have been responsive to a request, but I never thought that there was any kinship there at all.

G: Would it be fair to say that you were his leading tie to not only CBS but the entire television industry?

S: Well, it sounds immodest, but I would have to say yes to that.

G: Did he seek your advice on matters relating to the other networks as well, for example--?

S: To the extent that he would call and say, "I want to make a statement next week sometime. What's the best night to do it and what's the best hour to pick?" And I always had to think in terms of trying to be reasonably fair--I won't say I was totally fair--to pick a time period that didn't hurt any one of us to a disadvantage, that we were all--because in those days all networks carried the president whenever he indicated that he wanted to talk, and there were a couple of times when I did step up and take broadcasts that later my colleagues thought we shouldn't have taken because the other networks didn't take them. There was one he made at an AFL [American Federation of Labor] convention in Miami that I think turned out to be a political talk rather than a State of the Union kind of thing.

G: Were you under the impression that it was going to be a presidential rather than a political [speech]?

S: Well, it was represented that way, not to me by the President, but it was certainly represented that way by the channels in Washington, through the regular channels. See,

we were working really on a two-channel relationship. Frequently I would say, "Well, have your people talk to So-and-so and keep me out of it, but in the meantime, I'll get you privately what I think you should be doing." Because I didn't want to be identified as his errand boy in the industry, and I didn't want him to be embarrassed by the fact that he was dealing with one network and not all of them. So it was a six for him and a six for me that I did that. In fact, the day that he made his farewell statement, which was when, April 1 or whenever it was [1968].

G: March 31.

S: I think on the Saturday before he made the statement, he called me and caught me in the office and said, "Come on down. I'm going to make a talk tomorrow night," and he talked with me about the time period and so forth, "and come on down anyway because you're always telling me I don't do things right," and so forth.

G: Did he tell you the substance of what he was going to say?

S: No. So I said, "Gee, I don't think I ought to be in the White House when all the news people are floating around. It's so obvious that. . . ." "Oh, come on, and stay over the night with us." And I thanked him very much and said no, that what I would do was to order up a line from the Oval Office to my office in New York, and I'd come in on Sunday afternoon when he was going to rehearse, look at it, and give him any suggestions. And he sort of harrumphed around a little bit; that didn't seem to satisfy him. But that's all I was willing to do, because I felt uncomfortable for him in the sense that I didn't think that it was smart from a political point of view for him to be, in effect, in bed with one network as against the other two, or for that matter the wire services and so forth. So he said, "Well, then, you call me after I finish the rehearsal." I said sure, I would. And he did, I think, two run-throughs. Nothing was said that was all that earth-

shaking, and I gave him my comments, not on content as much as I did on the lighting and so forth.

By this time, it was around five-thirty or something because he was late starting out. I had asked my wife to stop in with me, to be in the office with me--I didn't have a line from the office to the house; I only had it to my private office--and said we'd go out to dinner afterwards, and so she should come down with me. It was so late by the time we finished the second run-through that I believe I said, "Let's just stay here and have a drink and watch the thing on the air, and then we can go have dinner late." And, of course, all hell broke loose when he finished it. I called right away, and he said something--I believe I recall this properly--about he wanted me to come down, and I wouldn't come and so forth. And I got off the line, because I could imagine there were ten thousand backed-up calls. Then we did go out to dinner, and then when I got home that night quite late and I'd gotten to bed--I fix the time around two o'clock; it might have been earlier than that, but I think it was two--he called me, almost as though we hadn't talked before, but not quite, and wanted to know what I thought, and this and that and so forth; told me who had called and who had come by to see him. And then--

G: I assume you were asleep; this was--

S: When he called?

G: Yes.

S: Oh, sure. He pulled me right out of sleep. And he said, "I want you to meet me at seven-thirty in the morning at Andrews [Air Force Base] and go to Chicago with me, because you got me into this goddamn thing, and I'm making a speech to the NAB [National Association of Broadcasters]." I don't recall ever having gotten him into that. It could be that I said in passing it would be a good idea to do it, but I don't think that I did.

And I said, "Well, I can't get into Andrews." And he said, "Why can't you get into Andrews?" And I said my plane--I was going to take the company plane--wouldn't have any clearance. "Oh," he said, "don't worry about that." So I woke up my pilots, because they had to get to the airport in time to get me down there, and I believe I said I wanted to take off at six o'clock, or maybe five-thirty. Anyway, I know it was an unconscionable hour for them, to say nothing of the fact that it was quite late for me. And I told the guys that I wanted to go to Washington, and I wanted them to go to National Airport and to file for that. I told them that the night before, because I didn't want to say anything about Andrews. In fact, I didn't know what the hell to say about it anyway. And I think we had no more than taken off from LaGuardia than the pilot came back sort of shaken and said, "I've just had an order to go into Andrews. Do you know anything about it?" And I said, "Yes, just go ahead." He said, "Well, are you sure we've got the proper clearance and so forth." And I said, "Yes, don't worry about it," because he didn't know anything about the President. We landed at Andrews and one of the officers, and I'm not sure who it was now, but certainly of sufficient rank that he shook up the pilot, came out in a jeep and with a couple of duty officers, and they met me at the bottom of the ramp and shot me over to *Air Force One*. And my two pilots stood there with their jaws down, because they didn't know what had happened. (Laughter) And then I did fly out with Johnson and so forth.

G: What was his mood after the speech?

S: The mood that morning was, "What are the papers saying about it? What do you think about it?" He'd talked to Hubert [Humphrey], and Hubert didn't know whether he wanted to run for president or not. "Can you imagine that? He doesn't know whether he wants to [run]." He'd gone over to see Muriel and Hubert, I guess, the Sunday morning after they

got home from church or something; that's my recollection of it. And I said to him, "Do you think I ought to talk to Hubert," in talking with him about the possibility of debating, and that's what opened up his disgust about Hubert. He said, "Well, who the goddamn hell told you he was going to run?" It was that kind of an abusive [response] in good nature but--and I said, "Well, I just assumed he was going to run." "Well, I wouldn't assume it. I went over there yesterday morning to tell Muriel and Hubert about it, and they wanted to think about it. Can you imagine that? They wanted to think about it!" So that was the mood he was in. I found him in a very--he was on a high.

G: Did it seem like a burden had been lifted?

S: Oh, I thought he was out of school. I'm sure that the second thoughts hadn't hit him yet by that time.

Then [Richard] Daley met us at the airport; Dan Rostenkowski was there, too. And the four of us went in Daley's car, walked onto the stage at, I guess, the old Stevens or what's the Hilton Hotel out there now. Lowell Thomas was talking to the convention and knew, of course, as did the leadership of the convention, that the President was coming. And when the President was in the wing, Lowell either heard the commotion or saw it out of the corner of his eye, and Lowell just turned and introduced the President, the President got on and made some remarks, marched off and went back to the airport.

Daley had tears in his eyes when he was talking with Johnson about it in the car. I was sitting in the jump seat, the President, I think, was sitting on the right, Daley in the middle and Dan was over to the left. Daley turned to the President and said, "Are you serious about this?" And Johnson spoke rather sternly to him and said, "Well, you heard what I said. I tried to reach you last night to tell you. Didn't somebody tell you that this was coming?" And Daley indicated yes, but he didn't believe it. Then going back out to

the airport, it was a little lighter mood, and we got to the plane, to *Air Force One*, and in the meantime had picked up somebody else, a state attorney, I guess, or an attorney from Daley's government in the city. He had some axes to grind that he wanted to talk about, and I felt like I was sort of a fifth wheel on the wagon.

But as we got into the back end of *Air Force One,* we expected the bus to come with the press crowd, and it didn't come, and it didn't come, and then somebody brought a note back and said that the bus had been in an accident and that they would be delayed, and the question was whether they'd send another plane or whether we should wait, and Johnson elected to wait. It was at that time that Daley said to the President, "Do you still want me to have the [Democratic National] Convention out here?" And the President said, "Yes, what's the matter, don't you want to have it here?" And Daley said something to the effect that he just hoped they could keep Martin Luther King out of Cook County. And the President said, "Why?" And Daley said, "I don't want him assassinated in Cook County." He didn't use the word assassinated; he didn't want him killed in Cook County, I think is what he said. No special note was taken of that, or at least to my knowledge; the President didn't say anything more to me about it later. But I sure as hell took note of it because there was a lot of question about what was going to happen at that convention, and as it turned out, it was a terrible convention from the standpoint of the crowds. Of course that was when? That was the first of April, and three weeks later, I guess, Martin Luther King was assassinated.

G: He was killed later that week.

S: Was it?

G: He was shot on the fourth, I think, of April. See, this was April 1; it was three days later, really.

S: Was it?

G: Yes. There were some efforts, I think, to move the convention to Miami.

S: I wanted to move it after that. See, the Republicans were meeting where? In Miami. And I offered I've forgotten how many millions of dollars to the Democrats if they would go to Miami, not as any favor to me, but simply because it would save us so much money [not] having to put all that equipment out there and then tear it out and go down to Miami. And I knew that it would save the same kind of money for the other two networks, and I knew I could get a participation in that kind of a settlement from [Leonard Harry] Goldenson [of ABC] and his counterpart at NBC. I don't think I ever talked with them about it, I was so confident that if I could bring that off that it would work.

G: Did you have the feeling that there was resistance from Daley, or who was the leading opponent?

S: I don't know who was the resistance. Daley was in Florida shortly after or around the time that I was putting on the pressure, and I thought maybe they were taking me seriously and doing something about it. Maybe somebody else had the same idea, I don't know. But I struck out. I didn't, obviously, get any place.

G: Was there strain between the networks and the White House as a result of the convention?

S: Oh, yes, I should say so.

G: Can you describe that in [detail]? You had at least several reporters beaten up at the [convention]?

S: Oh, yes. Sure. It was one of the most unpleasant experiences that I ever went through as far as the relations with--I'd even say relations with government, not just with the White

House. I remember one night Lyndon called me from, I guess, the White House. Anyway, he got me at home around ten or eleven o'clock at night and really took me apart for what the networks were doing to the American people and to the government and so forth.

G: How did you respond?

S: Well, I was offended by his attack on us because we were the ones who were getting beat up, and I thought we were doing what our job was, [which] was to show what was going on. And he, I'm sure, thought that we should have laid off and backed off of some of the things that we covered. But we covered the whole Chicago police force problem, and the park problem, and there were people faking as reporters who we always thought were part of the Daley organization, trying to get inside information as to what was going on. That was a terrible experience. I don't recall that I talked with him anymore about that during that week at all. In fact, I think things were strained at that time because of the--he was pretty bitter about it, and so was Humphrey.

G: Did they blame all three networks, or do you think they--?

S: Somehow, I never thought that the others got anything like the attention, if you will, that we got. So much so that I convened a meeting of our affiliates executive board, which is elected by the two hundred-odd affiliates, so it's a manageable group. I think it's twelve or thirteen, fourteen elected representatives. And [I] asked them to meet me and some of my associates, I believe, in Phoenix. We spent a whole day, and I went back and ran the tapes of what we had done, because they were pretty outraged. We were getting a lot of criticism from the public and from our critics in the print media because we were showing things that they could talk about, but we showed it going on. And the affiliates thought that we were being unnecessarily critical [of the police], so I made them sit for I

think the better part of a day, and we ran every speck of the tape that hit the sensitive parts of that week's coverage, and when the meeting broke up they were 100 per cent behind us. So I never felt that we were in any trouble with our own family, but we were in trouble with a lot of people in Washington.

G: Now, there was a good deal of editing, just to splice it down, I assume.

S: For the thing I showed the affiliates?

G: Well, and the things that aired over the--

S: Oh, no. A lot of that was live.

G: Oh, it was?

S: Sure.

G: I guess what I'm asking is, were there some things that were even more graphic, that were more violent, that you decided not to show on the air?

S: I don't recall that.

G: How did this episode affect your relations with Mayor Daley and the city of Chicago?

S: Well, I can't answer the last part because I'm not aware, from the standpoint of CBS headquarters, that we were ever affected. I'm sure that the station we owned in Chicago had its problems. But I was never that close to Daley as a figure, and I think the last time I ever saw him was that ride to the airport that I described earlier. I did see him the night of the first [Kennedy-Nixon] debate, but that predated what I'm talking about here by about eight years. So, no, as far as my own relations with Daley, nothing, and I don't recall that the company had any problem.

G: Did the reporters at CBS feel that the network had supported them, backed them up, as it should have?

S: Our reporters? Absolutely. I never had an inkling that we didn't.

G: You've mentioned Johnson's second thoughts about that March 31 speech [where he said] that he would not seek nor accept his party's nomination. Let me ask you what you knew about his second thoughts. Did he sound like he might want to be drafted or he might want to run again?

S: I guess I had said to him on one occasion that I was, in my own mind, sure that had he gotten through the eye of the needle of Chicago, that he would have been elected. And his response to that, as I recall it, was more an impression than what he said, but I got the feeling that maybe, just maybe, I was right. But he never said that he had second thoughts. I had the feeling in the way he responded to that that maybe he should have thought more about it. I think I did say to him once--no, this I guess was after he was out of office--that I thought that if there had been debates in 1964 that we would have been out of Vietnam much earlier. And he jumped right down my throat.

G: Did he?

S: Because that was a sore subject. My reasoning was that if there had been debates, I thought [Barry] Goldwater would have put him on the spot to the point where he would have taken some action quicker than he did. He sent me out to Vietnam, so I knew a little bit about that. But at any rate, that's the second-guessing; I've given you everything I can recall.

G: When you say "taken some action," you mean he would have introduced a larger number of troops earlier or that he would have pulled out earlier?

S: He'd have pulled back. I never thought that he was that committed to Vietnam. It was something he inherited, and he was going to clean it up and get it out and that was that. It was a managerial thing rather than a heartfelt leadership kind of thing, and I think that if he could have reasoned a way out of that thing, he might well have done it earlier. I

thought really the heat of the debates would have forced him into a resolution of that; that's what I mean.

G: Describe your own trip to Vietnam. You said he sent you out there to--

Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

S: Anyway, this I believe was in September of--1965? It may have been. Maybe you have evidence one way or the other there; I'm not [sure]. It doesn't make any difference, we can--

G: We'll fill in a date. [September 1965]

S: Yes. As I recall, he got me down on some basis, wanted to see me, and sprung it on me when I was there and said he wanted me to go out with the head of the AP [Associated Press], that is, the staff head, Frank Starzel. And he said, "Take along Ep [E. Palmer] Hoyt." And Ep I knew, and Ep was the editor of the *Denver Post* at the time. I asked him what he wanted, and he said he wanted to find out whether he was getting the real information out of Vietnam about what was going on. "You can do anything you want to do," [he said]. Well, you know, I was not briefed for this trip at all, nothing was offered, he wanted me to practically go without going home. I got hold of, I guess, Starzel first and then got hold of Hoyt. We agreed to meet in Saigon. They knew about it; they had been either pulled down or talked to or something. We had no agenda; it was just to go out and nose around, and we did that for about a week.

I thought we were getting a snow job from the military. Was Cab[ot] Lodge the ambassador? Yes, I think Cab Lodge was out there at that time. I think I stayed the night with him one night. I stayed with [William] Westmoreland one night at his place. I spent a lot of time with correspondents and people of that kind, trying to sense what was going on. Westmoreland sent us up to I Corps, sent us down to the Delta to look around. Well,

even with the proper briefing, this was an impossible task, to really form any solid recommendations. I believe we were there about a week or ten days, and I got word from the White House or from somebody through the chain of command out there that he wanted me to stop and see--who was our ambassador to India? Chet Bowles. He wanted me to go to Delhi and see Chet Bowles. I tell you, it was all I could do to be courteous, because it wasn't a very pleasant trip to begin with, and one of our two aircraft going down to the Delta either had an accident or something and landed up in a heap. Nobody was hurt; [they were] shaken up. But we were flying very low, and it was not a pleasant place to walk around, and every time you went out in a jeep, you had another jeep ahead of you with machine guns on it and everything else. It was a scary kind of thing, to no real end, although I did try to do some things on the information front. But--

G: What did you do?

S: Well, I tried to get some television in. This was before television had really hit that part of the world, and I thought that if they really put a lot of sets in to let the people see what was going on, that this might be a tool that could be used to try to break the logjam or the lack of feedback from the military activities. Then I met with the minister of--whatever his title was, he was the man that would have been in charge of this. He was noncommunicative in the meeting, and he wanted to take me back to my hotel and he wanted to drive me in his car alone. He put me in this Mercedes, and we went barreling down the road, and then he pulled off and wanted to talk. And what he said was, he would support the idea of bringing these television sets in if he got a piece of the action.

G: Did he really?

(Laughter)

S: And that began to tell you something about what was going on.

G: How did you respond to him?

S: I told him that I thought this was totally out of the question, and if something like that took place, he'd have to negotiate that with somebody higher than in my position. He didn't know who the hell I was. Maybe he did, but I played it down and said that I just thought it was totally uncalled for and couldn't be done, but if he could work it out on his own level, that was up to him. Nothing ever did happen, or if it did, I didn't know about it. When we finished doing this, Johnson said to go out [to India]--I guess I might have even talked to the President from Saigon--just about that time there was an oil strike or some problem about getting fuel into India and that whole area, and Westmoreland didn't want to send me over in one of his planes, and the airlines weren't flying because they couldn't get fuel, and it was pretty chaotic. Pan Am was still flying that route. So I took my merry band and we went to Tokyo.

We had gone into Saigon from--I'm not sure where. We came in a different way than we went out. But we went to Tokyo, and as soon as we got to Tokyo I called the White House to tell the President we were out; I think I talked to one of his secretaries, maybe Walter [Jenkins]. [I] said that we were out, and we'd come in to see him when we got back, if that was in order. And the word was, "Be back here tomorrow." Well, that was next to impossible, but we did get back as soon as we could. [He] talked briefly with the three of us; we met briefly with him, and he said, "I want you to go right over and see Bob McNamara." And he picked up the phone and called McNamara and he said who was coming over, and, "I don't care what you're doing; I want you to see these guys right away." And we got over there and McNamara met us on the courthouse steps, so to speak, to welcome us. I had known Bob anyway, and he was very cordial, and, I guess,

knew we were out there. We sat and talked to Cy Vance and to Bob about the morale of our troops and so forth.

But this [trip] was really a waste of everybody's time, because I don't think we came back with anything that was very helpful to the President. I think we did disclose to him that we didn't think we got any hard information from the military and that there was a lot of morale [problems] on the civilian side of our forces out there. I'm not talking about our military forces, but at the staff level of the embassy and so forth, the people were beginning to be doubtful about the wisdom of the whole thing.

G: Did you have a chance to talk to any of your people from CBS while you were out there?

S: Oh, yes, sure.

G: What was their impression of it?

S: Well, on two or three nights we had a long drinking session with the press corps that was out there, and they didn't know what the hell we were doing. That's the first thing they wanted to know, and thank God I had the head of AP and a solid editor with me, because these were two journalists that the print guys respected. I even think the CBS correspondents--I think Charlie Collingwood was out there at the time, and I've forgotten who else was there; we had two or three bureaus out there at that time--they were very skeptical of the whole thing and felt that we, the United States, were not making the progress that they thought the Pentagon thought we were making and so forth.

But one thing that did happen is that when I went up to I Corps, Westmoreland sent us up in one of his--it was represented as his private plane. It was a small jet, and we were flying very, very high, at like thirty-nine thousand feet, as I recall, high for what I thought we needed to fly for that short jump, and I know we talked to the pilot about it. He said it was just that this aircraft was known to the North Vietnamese, and it was too

easy to be shot down, a very comforting thought. When we landed at wherever the hell it was now--doesn't make any difference, it was an established base--the marine commandant--was it [Lewis] Walt? It might have been; I'm not sure--was supposed to meet us. And he was not there at the time we landed, and the apology was that he was tied up and was sorry. But he would never see me, and the reason he wouldn't see me is that he accused Morley Safer of having sent a story back that he said was faked. If my life depended on it, I would tell you that in my opinion it was not faked. It was when the Marines were lighting the thatched roofs in the village and burning out the Vietnamese, and the Marines felt that this was all a trumped-up effort on the part of CBS News. I spent a lot of time on that when I got back, because I wanted to be sure in my own mind that we at CBS headquarters had our information in line. In fact, I think Safer and several others were cited several times and got commendations, not, obviously, from the White House, but from the press corps generally for having done that story.

So there was hostility *vis-à-vis* me, and the press corps was very apprehensive as to what the hell we were doing out there, and I never felt that we could say, "Well, we're here to go back and tell Johnson what the hell's going on." That didn't serve anybody. Then the fact that we had such entree meant that we were there more than just a couple of blokes coming out for a Sunday afternoon frolic. So the whole thing was an unpleasant experience.

G: Was there any feeling that LBJ sent you out there to try to persuade you and the others of the correctness of his course?

S: I don't think so. I think he knew us well enough to know that he wasn't going to change us. If we had been doing something wrong, obviously, but that thought never crossed my mind. By the way, is there any evidence that that's what he was--?

G: No. Did Morley Safer and the others express frustration with what became known as the Saigon Follies or the Five O'Clock Follies, the press briefings?

S: Oh, yes, sure. We got that from everybody out there. And I attended them. I sat in on them. I think I sat in on them on three occasions when I was there. I'd forgotten about it until you mentioned it. Sure.

G: I guess Walter Cronkite's change of heart or change of attitude or perhaps not a change at all, perhaps just more of an outspoken attitude on the war was considered a major factor in--

S: Johnson's decision? I know the President told me that. He knew the thing was over when Walter declared himself, whenever it was.

G: Had you talked to Cronkite before?

S: Before? No. I think the President attributed more to Walter than was there, but that's my opinion against his, that's all. I don't have any--but I never talked about it with Walter.

G: Did he accuse CBS of unfair coverage in Vietnam, or unfair analysis?

S: Oh, yes. Bill Moyers did, and Bob McNamara did. But that went with the turf. You know, Truman did, Eisenhower did. We did a debate with Khrushchev--no, not a debate; we did "Face the Nation" with Khrushchev, and [John] Foster Dulles and Eisenhower went public with an attack on me, on CBS, for having dealt with the enemy, so to speak. I don't know, I was used to that. That doesn't make it pleasant, but I mean that's part of the job.

G: In the case of Lyndon Johnson, could you mollify him to some extent when he would lash out at you as a representative of CBS?

S: I think so.

G: How would you come back at him; what would you--?

S: Well, I would respectfully disagree with him and cite my reasons for it, and more times than not he'd say, "Come on down to the Ranch for the weekend." That was the way it would end up.

G: Would you do it?

S: Sometimes, but no, very infrequently.

G: Do you think he had an appreciation for the press' role in American society, or do you think that he felt like he ought to be able to have more influence on the press than he did?

S: Every president that I've had the privilege of knowing has felt he got a bad deal from the press, and that there ought to be some way to do something about it. But when you sit down and talk with them about it, then that sort of disappears. Certainly, I remember the night that Jack Kennedy got hold of Newt Minow when he was chairman of the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] and got him out of a dinner party to tell him he wanted [Chet] Huntley and [David] Brinkley off the air, "You've got to do something about that," and I think scared the hell out the Chairman of the FCC. But he did have the good judgment to say, "Can I come by tomorrow and talk to you about it?" And by tomorrow morning, the tempers had cooled. But certainly Nixon was that way, still is that way. I never got that same kind of back-of-the-hand from Jerry Ford, but by that time, I was retired. But the time when I did first get close to Ford, early on, when he was in the House, I thought that he was the least abusive of somebody who was in a high place about the press.

G: Lyndon Johnson had a reputation as being someone who would read an article that was 90 per cent favorable and react to the 10 per cent that was unfavorable. Do you feel that he was this way, and if so, more than the other politicians were within--?

S: I don't know whether he was more this way than the others. Because I was reasonably close to him, I saw more of that with him, but I'm not certain in my own mind that everyone isn't pretty much the same way that way. They all feel that way, and I'm sure that Senator [Daniel] Inouye today feels that print journalism and television has done him in, in these present [Iran-Contra] hearings. Truman exploded one day to me about--in those days, it was radio. No, I think that the one I had the least day-to-day experience with was Nixon. He was just so negative that you barely talked to him about it.

I've no idea what my relations would have been with Reagan if I had been--when he was governor, I know that he took exception to something that CBS did, and a friend of mine from California said, "You better come out and see him, because someday he's going to be an important man, and you ought to get to know him." I never did, so I don't know anything about him. But I would guess that he's no different than anybody else. Look, there were plenty of times when I was angry, not with the press generally, but with people in my own shop, because I didn't think that they were fair to me. They reported a couple of times when I was on the stand, and I thought they took the wrong excerpt to put on the air. So I know how these guys feel. Now, I think they'd go out of their way to take a swipe at management but nevertheless I think my nerves are close enough to the surface that I can appreciate what they were feeling. And I think there have been times when the press has been unfair no question about it.

G: Can you think of any occasion where, let's say, President Johnson protested to you about something, and then something was done, either another story to give it a different spin or balance, or a change of assignment, or anything like that that indicated a reaction?

S: No. My philosophy was that I would absorb the criticism and try to reason, and privately would try to find out whether there was any justification to it. But I never ordered

anything to be changed. On occasion I think as a result of discussions such as we have been talking about with people at the White House, I have cautioned that we ought to have a very solid basis for some of the things that we were doing, but never to change a story or anything of that kind. It was just to reinforce my own management, that's all.

G: Okay. There was the whole question in 1960 of the suspension of the Fairness Doctrine to allow those presidential debates--

S: Not the Fairness Doctrine, the repeal of Section 315 [of the Communications Act of 1934].

G: Is that what it was?

S: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to give me the background on that and what your role was in it.

S: In 1952--that was the first time Eisenhower ran, wasn't it?

G: Yes.

S: In 1952, I wrote a guest column for the *New York Herald Tribune*. I think one of the columnists made it a practice of asking people in various businesses and so forth to write a guest column while he was on vacation. Anyway, it was John Crosby, as I recall. Maybe it was Roscoe Drummond. No, it was John Crosby. [He] asked me to write a column, and I wrote a column about the desirability of having presidential debates. I then talked either before that or after that with a couple of people in the Senate about it, and one of them was a senator from Michigan whose name I don't recall. But I didn't find any takers, and nobody was bowled over by the column.

But I sort of got the bug then that it would be a good thing to do it and went before our affiliates in 1953 in convention, or possibly 1954, and tried to get them to support me on this and to say they would carry them if we got them. There were a couple

of affiliates who thought we should keep our nose out of politics and so forth. Always out of a couple of hundred you're going to get some nuts and some people who are nervous nellies anyway. But I kept pushing ahead, and then in 1956 I got hold of Ben Duffy, who was then the campaign manager for President Eisenhower, and said that I thought this would be a desirable thing to do. And Duffy thought that it was a hell of a good idea from my point of view, but a perfectly stinking idea from Eisenhower's point of view, and he wouldn't have any part of it. Stevenson, of course, was willing to do it; I'd already talked to Adlai Stevenson. So it died. If you can't get the Hamlet, there is no point in doing anything about it. In 1959 or 1958, someplace along in there, I began beating the drums again in the industry for it. Got no takers in the industry, but decided--there was a hearing about free time. I think Bill Fulbright or John Pastore--no, it was John Pastore's committee [that] had a hearing because Fulbright and Stevenson, I believe, wanted to get the networks to give up a block of time throughout the campaign for their use any way they wanted to use it. And I found this offensive and irresponsible on our part, to turn the air over to somebody else when, after all, it was something we ought to be doing. And I took a rather--it was a rough hearing that Pastore was conducting, rough in the sense that Adlai and two or three other people who preceded the industry as witnesses were asking for--just really commandeering our time.

I was the first industry witness up. I had been asking for consideration on the debates, couldn't get anybody on the Hill to take me seriously. And I turned to Leon Brooks [?], who was my Washington lawyer--no, I guess he was in the law department in New York. Anyway, he was there with me, and I felt like the lamb going to slaughter because I knew that I was going to ask for the temporary suspension, but I just expected

to get blasted out of the chair. I wasn't going to back off, but I didn't feel very comfortable.

And I said to Leon, "I've got to have something new to offer." And he said, "Well, I suppose if you can't get a permanent change, you can ask for a temporary resolution." I didn't know what the hell a temporary resolution was except I understood what temporary was and I didn't know the procedure. When Pastore was being pretty--not hostile. John Pastore had a sharp tongue and was a little fiery guy, anyway and he was buying the Stevenson position and was saying I ought to give up the time and so forth. And I finally said--of course, this was in the period of cross-examination where you get in most of your licks anyway--"At least consider a temporary resolution." If he'd have said, "Tell me what you mean," I wouldn't have known what I [meant]. He turned to the staff of mine and said, "Well, you know, why don't you come in and talk with me about this, and we'll talk about it." Well, I lit up like a pinball machine because this was an invitation to reopen the thing with Senator Pastore. I went in to see him, and I told him what I had in mind was to do it for--was to lift it for one election for president, vice president, governors, and I believe I stopped there, because he [had] said at that very first meeting, "Don't talk about the Senate. I'm not going to have any young kid come down out of Harvard and run against me and debate me." So I knew I was on bad turf at that point.

I kept saying, "Can't we get it for just president and vice president?" "Well," he said, "why don't you go around and talk to members of the committee." So I got Maggie [Warren Magnuson], who was chairman of the parent committee, and talked with him, and Maggie said, gee, he didn't have any objection to it. "If you can get enough guys up here to support it, go ahead." Then I went around and rang every doorbell I could ring.

Spent a lot of time trotting up and down the halls talking about it. Didn't find hostility as long as it was just the president and vice president. Didn't find anybody saying, "I'm going to go out and promote it," but they certainly didn't throw me out. And I remember with--I kept Magnuson and Pastore informed and had lunch with them a couple of times in the Senate dining room to keep them up to date on what I was doing. I guess they got encouraged enough to say that--I think that they asked me to give them a bill. By that time, of course, I found out what the hell I was talking about, and we did give them some sample legislation, and it moved forward on the Senate side and we got it through.

I began talking it up with their senators, and so I was organizing that pretty much from headquarters here. But I earlier learned that you didn't accomplish--at least I didn't think I got any legislation through by doing it in Washington. It had to come from the field. So I went on closed-circuit television every day until--not every day, but when I finished the round of meetings, I got on closed-circuit at four o'clock or so in the afternoon and would sit and talk to the affiliates and say this is where it stands. And we got it through.

G: They would then write letters or make calls?

S: Oh, write letters, hell. They came in. Or if their senators were home over a weekend, they got them in and found out where they stood. They were very supportive. I don't want to misrepresent it and give you the impression I had fifty of them out there, but I had twenty-five or thirty that were damned important affiliates--important to the senators as well as to me.

We got [it] through the Senate, and then I went to see Oren Harris in the House. Oren wasn't somebody I ever felt very--I had no relationship with him in any way like I had it with Pastore and Magnuson; I sort of felt I grew up with them on the Hill. But he

listened to me and knew what had gone on in the Senate. In fact, I laid the cards on the table and said that without his support I didn't see how we could get this thing going on the House side. He was skeptical but didn't say "get the hell out," and I saw all the members of his committee and didn't run into any strong resistance. Again, there wasn't anybody saying this is the greatest idea since sliced bread, but we were making progress and getting close to the convention time.

In the meantime, to answer questions from senators about, "Well, how do you know they'll debate?" I went to see Nixon, and I went to see Johnson, because he looked like a candidate, and I could talk to him. When I went into his outer office and was greeted by--I've forgotten the woman's name now--but at any rate, she was very friendly, and she said, "Why don't you go on in. He's got someone with him, but go on in." Lo and behold, it was Jack Kennedy. So Johnson shouted from across the room, "What do you want?" or, "What are you doing in here?" Something like that. And I went over, meek as a lamb, and said, "Well, I was sort of trying to get some votes for my effort on debate, and one of the things I would like to know is if you are a candidate"--by this time I was smart enough to address the two of them--"would you be willing to debate?" I said to Kennedy that I was going to come by his office, and I might as well ask him here. And Johnson said, no, he wasn't going to debate, or he'd think about it or something, but it was totally negative.

G: Why was he negative?

S: I don't know why he was negative, but he remained negative on that score. I turned to Jack Kennedy and said, "How do you feel about it?" He said, "Well, tell me about it." I told him roughly how I thought the thing would develop. That the two candidates would appear for an hour or an hour and a half in prime time, and we'd have three or four

journalists who would ask them questions, and they'd each have a crack at it and so forth. And he smiled and said, gee, he'd do it. Well, I went out of there feeling very good because I had one of the two that looked like they might be the candidates.

The Nixon thing I got in a very strange way. I can't remember the name of the man who was his assistant, but he was the man who later ran for the [state] senate in California and, I believe, was either elected to the senate or elected governor, later became secretary of HEW under [Nixon].

G: Was it Bob Finch?

S: Yes. Finch was his assistant, I think, when Nixon was vice president. Finch came out of the vice president's office up at the Capitol where I'd gone to see him--and I knew him--and he said could he help me because the Vice President was in a meeting. So I told him what I was there for, and he said, "No question about it. He'll debate. You don't have to bother asking him." He said, "He'll just chew up anybody. You know he was a champion debater at Whittier [College]." And gave me this terrific sell about Nixon and assured me that I didn't have to bother about talking to him because he'd commit him. So that took care of that side because it was clear that he was going to--or at least to me it was clear--be the [Republican] candidate. That's why then I went on the other side.

G: How about [Hubert] Humphrey or any of the other [Democratic candidates?]

S: I never talked to Humphrey. I don't think in 1960 that Humphrey was even anybody that was being talked about at that time.

G: Well, he ran in some of the primaries.

S: Yes, but he wasn't anybody that--at least I didn't take him seriously. I don't know why the hell I should have had that feeling, but I didn't.

Then we had a hell of a time getting it through the House. Oren Harris one afternoon said--I didn't say this to him, but I said this to one of my colleagues--"I don't think I'm going to get any place in the House unless I can get Sam Rayburn to support this thing." Knowing that Lyndon was against it, I didn't think I had a chance of getting Sam Rayburn. So I went to Oren, and I said, "Time is running out, and if we don't get this through the House, all of my work is down the drain. I think we're missing a hell of an opportunity because it will be another eight years before the clock will come around this way." "Well," he said, "let's go over and see Mr. Sam. Can you get a date with him?" He said, "I'm not going to get it for you, but can you get it on your own?" So I did a little reconnoitering and found out--and I didn't want to go to Lyndon because I knew I wouldn't get any help there. And I don't mean that negatively; I just mean friendly knowledge led me to believe that he wasn't going to embrace it.

I learned that Sam Rayburn and Gene Autry had a good relationship, so I got hold of Gene, who was one of our affiliates, and said could he get me in to see him. "Why sure, no problem." Well, not only that, but Sam Rayburn's office called and said did I want to see him. So I went down and got Harris and said, "Come go along with me." Well, Oren Harris was so impressed that I got that appointment with Sam Rayburn overnight practically that I went over--what they had to do was to suspend the rules in order to bring it up. And it was Sam Rayburn and somebody from his staff and Oren Harris and me in his office. I told him what I wanted and where we stood on the Senate side. He turned to Oren, who was chairman of the House committee, and he said, "Oren, have you got the votes?" Oren turned to me and he said, " Frank, have we got the votes?" (Laughter) I said, "Yes, Mr. Speaker." And Sam said, "We'll do it next Monday afternoon." We walked out of there--I was delighted, didn't know what I had gotten--but

[we] walked out of there, and Oren Harris was shaking like a leaf. Oren grabbed me by the arm, walking across from the grounds there, and said, "Have you got the votes?" I said, "No, but we'll get the votes." He said--his voice was shaking--"You know, if you don't get the votes, Mr. Sam will kill me." I said, "Don't worry, we'll get them." And we did get the votes. So that's how we got it through.

G: How did you get the votes?

S: With the affiliates, because I got on closed-circuit and told them that we had--they knew we had gotten a victory in the Senate, and we were close. I didn't tell them anything about the meeting with the Speaker, but simply said it was coming up and this was the time to get on the phone or come into Washington and line up the votes. I didn't have any compunction about doing it because this was something for the public good. It was just that somebody had to get off his duff and do it.

G: Did the other networks help at all in this?

S: No. In fact, they dragged their feet because it wasn't invented there, and by this time, I was identified with it and so there wasn't anybody there saying--to my knowledge no one said, "It's a bad idea," but they sure as hell weren't down there walking up and down the halls with me. So I spent the summer doing that.

G: How about the print media? What was their reaction to this?

S: It took them by complete surprise. In fact, I don't think they realized the potential of what was introduced in Chicago at that first debate. In fact, Mayor Daley didn't, either, because at that first debate after we had put--it was in our studio in Chicago, and the Secret Service insisted that we have, obviously, the tightest kind of security because this was the first time, except for a banquet that was given by some cause in the Catholic Church, where the two leading candidates were ever under the same roof at the same

time. So we split the building in half. We had offices for staff and the candidates and everything split. We had an interior drive so they could drive right into the building.

During the debate, I was in the control room, and as soon as the debate was over, I got out. In those days, the control room was right on the studio floor; today it isn't. But I went right out of the control room right down on the floor and went forward to thank the two candidates. Nixon had already left the studio by the time I got to the other end of the studio. There was a Secret Service man or an FBI man standing there, and I said, "Which direction did the Vice President go?" He said, "He's already gone. He's gotten in his car and left." Didn't take his briefcase or anything.

I then turned around. Because we had everything split, I couldn't get over into the Kennedy side without coming back through the studio and going out. I walked down the long hall where these little cubicles were and there was one door open with a light out into the hall, and a lot of people standing outside the door. I knew that was the Kennedy suite, and as I walked by it or walked into the light coming out of the door, Bob Kennedy was standing inside, and he motioned me to come in. I went in, and then there was a side door, or a door from that little cubicle into the next little cubicle, and Bobby said, "Why don't you go in and see him?" I went in there, and there was just a desk light on and Senator Kennedy was on the telephone. He leaned over and stuck out his hand and motioned me to sit down. I did sit down. It was clear he was talking to somebody close to him because he made the comment that "we sure took this one." I was a little embarrassed, and I got up to go, and he motioned for me to sit down. Finally, he hung up and he said, "You know Dick Daley." The room was so dark and it was a very small office, I didn't even see Daley standing in the corner.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

S: And I got up and shook hands with Daley. You know, I had done my part. I thanked Kennedy for doing it and reminded him of the first discussion we had about when I'd asked him whether he would do it. He was very cordial. Daley walked out with me and we walked down the hall together, not arm in arm but side by side. He said, "How well do you know this young man?" Because it was clear to him that Kennedy knew me and that I had some relationship with him earlier. "How well do you know this young man?" I told him I barely knew him, but that I had talked with him about the debates. "Why?" I said. He said, "You know, until tonight I wasn't going to support him. I think I'll put my organization behind him." He said, "Do you think he'll make it?" I said, "If tonight is any test of the contest, I think he's got it made." With that we shook hands, and he went his way and I went my way. The next morning, the [*Chicago*] *Tribune* announced that he had decided that he was going to support Kennedy. So the debates had that kind of an impact on Daley.

G: Let me ask you to amplify your own impression of the debate. Did it go in terms of procedure and format as you had envisioned it when you were pushing the legislation?

S: No, because the negotiation to get the debate in any kind of form at all where two guys sat down in front of a microphone, that negotiation--which I didn't participate in but stayed very close to--was handled by two of my key people.

G: Who were they?

S: Sig Mickelson was one, and I think Don Hewitt, who produces *60 Minutes*, was the director, and he was involved. It was a tug of war: how you pick the correspondents; what the physical format of it is. I was so nervous about the way the thing was going that the week of the actual broadcast--and I've forgotten what day of the week it was--I went out to Chicago to look at the set and to be sure that the security arrangements were

[made]. I was so emotionally involved or intellectually involved in the whole idea that, goddamn it, I wasn't going to have anything happen that would upset it. So I spent a lot of time out there, and was thoroughly disgusted with the furniture they were using because I thought it was entirely too baronial and heavy. As it turned out, I said that I had a couple of chairs in my office that I thought would work better than these heavy chairs that they were using, and literally shipped them out on a plane, changed the background material because it wasn't right. It turned out that I went too far perhaps in the sparse direction, but I didn't want it to look like they were behind barricades when they were debating. I wanted the feel that they were--so I had a very thin, almost a musician stand there for their notes. I wanted the men to be fully exposed in terms of their physical being on camera, and then to sit down not in a chair that was a lounge chair but in a chair where they would sit up at some attention.

I was involved to the extent that when Kennedy was taking his audio level check, I was in the control room and he was wearing socks that were down to here, and his leg was bare clear up to here. He was wearing a navy suit and of course it looked like hell on a camera, to have a bare leg clear up to the knee. I got hold of the man who was handling the Democratic side and said, "You'd better get a pair of socks for the Senator," and showed him on camera what it looked like. And in nothing flat they had him some socks in the back room and [he] put the socks on and so forth. So you asked what I did, I was with it from the first day to the last.

G: Was there ever a time when you thought the debate might fall through, that it might not actually happen?

S: This held by a thread from the time the convention closed until the first debate. You couldn't get these guys to light and to make up their mind whether they were going to do

it in Chicago or Boston or where the hell they were going to do it. It had never happened before. They had to mesh their campaigning schedules; they had to be sure they had the right people asking them questions. Oh, just every step of the way it was trouble.

G: Did one of them, do you think, bend over backwards, or was one of them more cooperative?

S: I don't know the answer to that.

G: Did one want to debate more than the other, do you think?

S: Oh, I don't think I could say this on the basis of anything I saw at the time, but in the end I came to believe that Kennedy wanted to, and Nixon didn't want to.

G: Some of the people who were there indicated that Nixon seemed nervous beforehand.

S: Oh, he was. I told you that we had--where the debate took place was in a studio that was a converted riding academy, and that riding academy had facilities so carriages and horses could go through it from one side of the building to the other, and could come up into what was the riding rink. Those were all converted to studios and offices but we kept that roadway--it wasn't a road, but that pathway--not for bringing cars in but for moving sets and things of that kind for television. So when it was agreed we were going to use those studios, we, in consultation with the FBI or the Secret Service--I've forgotten now; who has the jurisdiction, the Secret Service?

G: Secret Service, yes.

S: It was decided that they would bring the candidates' cars right into that driveway and then they'd get out. All they'd have to do was open the door and they were in the studio. So we minimized any heckling from the crowds, because there was some opposition, not to the debate, but to the appearance of the candidates. I've forgotten what that issue was. We assured the candidates that they could come right in, and they'd have no trouble. I

believe General Motors or somebody had the concession to use white Chevrolets and drive them from the hotels out.

Nixon got there first, and contrary to what we had advised his people, that he should wear a dark suit and a blue shirt and something else--I've forgotten what it was--he shows up in a light suit and a white shirt. And [he] had been in the hospital for a couple of days before and had lost a lot of weight, and you could literally put his hand inside of his collar, it stuck out that much. His pallor was terrible. But he got out of the car. Now, the car--this is the wall where all the dignitaries stood. The heads of the networks and, I guess, the producer and the director, anybody that was involved in the thing was standing over here in a reception line, and we put bleachers or stands over here for the press photographers. But the car came in, and Nixon was sitting in the front seat with the driver, and he got out, and in his eagerness to get out and come over, he banged his knee on the door so bad that I thought he was going to faint. It was like when you hit your crazy bone. He didn't. He went down, not on both knees, but he went down. He really hit himself hard. Then [he] came over and shook hands with me, and the press photographers said, "Mr. Vice President, over here, over here," because they wanted him to look at the camera, and he didn't know where [they were]. He couldn't orient himself; he was just shaken up by this. Finally, he went through the receiving line, and I walked him into the studio and turned him over to the producer to tell him what he wanted for voice levels and so forth. Showed him the set. He was sitting in the chair.

Now, in those days we had boom microphones that hung right over your head. And Nixon was obviously interested in what the routine was and where the people were going to sit, and we showed him. They were sort at a lower level; they weren't on the same level as the candidates. And he was sitting there at the time I got word that

Kennedy was arriving, so I scampered out to do the act all over again. Now, he gets out. He's as brown as a nut, full of bounce. Navy suit. Looked terrific. No problem about the photographers. Everything just clicked for him. Walked into the studio. Nixon, when he saw him, jumped up to speak to him, and this microphone hit him right on his head. It was just like somebody had taken a watermelon and dropped it on the floor. So he not only knocked himself out with his knee, but he damn near knocked himself out with that microphone. (Laughter)

I was just dumbfounded. I didn't know what to do, because I was the host. It was in our studio. And that's how we started off that night, and that's how we ended. Nixon just went right out. I've taken long too much time for this, but--

G: Did Kennedy come in right at the time to go on the air or did he give you plenty of time?

S: Oh, no. He came in in advance of the broadcast. Time enough for me to have seen his socks and so forth.

G: What about make-up? Did either of them wear [it]?

S: Kennedy had make-up. That's my recollection. Nixon did not. We offered makeup to both of them. We had excellent facilities, people for that. Nixon turned it down. He had, not a growth, but he hadn't shaved just before he came on and he had the kind of stubble that looked bad on camera, to say nothing of the fact that he looked so gaunt and pale.

G: There have been suggestions that those who listened to the debates on radio thought that Nixon won and those who watched it on TV [thought Kennedy won].

S: A lot of people did.

G: What was your own assessment? Do you think--?

S: My own assessment was that--I didn't listen to it, so I can't [judge]--but I clearly felt that Nixon had taken it [a loss?] and recalled with sort of a wry smile on my face the conversation that I had had with his assistant.

G: Okay.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

FRANK STANTON

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Frank Stanton of New York City, New York, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted in New York City on April 21, July 22, and August 26, 1987, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) Until my death, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Donor

07 26 99

Date

Archivist of the United States

8-13-99

Date