INTERVIEW III

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK STANTON

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

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

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Moving to the next presidential election in 1964, was there any effort made to have a debate between President Johnson and Barry Goldwater?

S: No, because President Johnson blocked that from the very outset. [John] Pastore had put the legislation through the Senate side. The House had still not acted, but was prepared to act just about the time that President Kennedy was assassinated. I, with President Kennedy's complete support, had gone to Senator Pastore to get the legislation. And indeed, I believe that Jack Kennedy interceded with Senator Pastore on that legislation. Oren Harris, if I'm not mistaken, was chairman of the committee in the House. But I know that we were well down the road on the House side about the time of the assassination. And I believe one of the first things that President Johnson said to me, when I saw him face-to-face a day or two after the assassination, was that he would not consider debates. So I didn't waste my brownie points on the Hill trying to get the legislation, because if you can't get Hamlet, you've got no party.

G: Did he say why he didn't want to [consider debates]?

S: No, but he made it quite clear in the 1960 campaign at the time of the fourth debate. There was talk in the press about a fourth debate, and at that time, my idea was that once

we had done the three networks on the presidential candidates, that it would be entirely appropriate to do the vice presidents. Lyndon was down in the Carolinas someplace campaigning, and he must have either heard it or somebody in a news conference must have asked him about it, and probably quoted me because I had given an interview, I believe with either UP [United Press] or AP [Associated Press], [saying] that what I wanted to see [was] if we couldn't arrange a debate with the vice presidential candidates. And my recollection is it was around eight o'clock in the evening that Senator Johnson called me and chewed me out, in a friendly fashion, and said he wasn't going to debate, and if I wanted to get somebody else to debate, fine, but forget it, he wasn't going to do it.

G: How does one chew you out in a friendly fashion? What was the tone?

S: Well, knowing the man as I did, I knew that this would be a storm that would pass over, and just as the opposing lawyers go out to lunch together after the argument, I expected he'd end up by saying, you know, "What are you doing? Come down this weekend," or something like that. He generally was pretty rough because he didn't like what the evening news did or what somebody else did. And he was characteristically unhappy with me about the idea of getting him into a debate. Who was it? [Henry Cabot] Cab Lodge at that time?

G: Yes.

S: Yes. And he wanted just absolutely no part of it. Forget it. And he put me on notice and, of course, I had to respect his wishes in the matter, and that was the end of it. We had the fourth debate, but it was at ABC studio, here in New York, with Kennedy and Nixon, and that was the last debate.

G: You've talked about the first one in Chicago. I've neglected to ask you about the other three debates in 1960.

S: Well, the second one, as I recall, was in California, and I believe the third and fourth were both in New York.

G: Did you play a significant role in the arrangements for the last three?

S: No, not after the first one. I thought that was my obligation, to make sure that the first one got on and so forth. And there was a lot of bickering about the selection of journalists to participate in the subsequent debates. But I was there in person at each of the four debates, but I didn't get involved in the arrangements for anything except the first one. And indeed, NBC was the host for the second one, and I guess the second one took place in Washington. The third one, I believe, took place in California, was ABC, and the fourth one was in New York, and it was ABC. ABC had two of them, and I was incorrect on what I said earlier because it was Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles, and New York.

G: Did Vice President Nixon take any measures to correct the problems that he'd had in the first debate, either with appearance or clothes or anything of that nature? Makeup?

S: I don't recall that he did, but he would have been a strange man indeed if he hadn't taken any.

G: Why wouldn't Lyndon Johnson have wanted to debate? He had been a debate coach himself. He was regarded as a very persuasive guy.

S: Well, I can't put myself inside of Lyndon and say to you why he didn't do it. I do know that he was very defensive about Senator Kennedy's ability to talk extemporaneously and handle himself in front of a television camera. I remember one evening during the campaign, that summer or late in the summer--I guess he was already a vice presidential

candidate, although I'm not sure that he was; if the date ever becomes important, I can check it--he and Lady Bird called and asked Ruth and me to have dinner with them. And my wife was either out of town or committed, and I had dinner with Lady Bird and Lyndon at a restaurant on Park Avenue on a Sunday evening. I believe it was a Sunday evening. This was prior to the convention, because one of the things that Senator Johnson, at that time, wanted me to tell him was how he could somehow get on top of a script very quickly without having to refer to it.

He characterized Senator Kennedy as being able to read a memorandum and somehow get on top of it very quickly and go out and talk about it. And yet I'm confusing that, I believe, in my memory with some of his comments about the way President Kennedy could look at something and walk out into the Rose Garden and talk. It could be that memory is playing tricks on me, but I still think it was prior to the convention that he talked with me about needing some help to be effective on camera.

G: Yes. He was going to be on *Face the Nation*, and I have a note here that he did seek your advice in 1960 on television appearances.

S: I refer to this experience in response to your question only because I had no indication that he ever felt comfortable in front of a television camera. Indeed, and perhaps I've already referred to this, after he became president, I urged Lady Bird to let me put cameras in the Cabinet Room and televise, or to record, everything that went on in there. Just let him see himself on camera, get used to the fact that the camera was in the room with him. And he would have no part of it. My argument to her and to him when he jumped me about it--because he was quick to seek me out and chew me out again because I was proposing such a thing--my argument at that time was that this was such an

effective medium, and he was so persuasive when he really got to talking to you, as anyone who had ever been exposed to him knew. That never came through. He was not quite Tom Dewey on the wedding cake, but he was the elocution student, really, on camera; he didn't sound natural. And I've seen him take a group of businessmen and others and charm them right out of the trees. And that didn't come through on television at all. In a news conference or anything else, he never got that fire in his belly that he got when he was talking to people.

One day--and this is a matter of the record--he did a news conference in the East Room, I guess. Why in there, I don't know, but there was a lectern, and he had a lavaliere mike on, and he walked away from the lectern without any papers in front of him or anything between him [and his audience], and he was fantastic. He called me or I called him after the news conference, and I'm not sure whether it was one way or the other, but I talked with him minutes after it was over, and I just said he was fantastic, and said, "What the hell happened?" And he said, "Well, your friend John Pastore came down here and told me that if he"--John Pastore--"was as tall as I was and could really hit us [them] over the head the way I used to do up on the floor of the Senate that he [Johnson] ought to do that on his news conference." He said, "I just thought I'd try it." And I said, "You were terrific," and I encouraged him to do it the next time. And the next time, he was behind the lectern.

Strangely enough, or not so strangely, but certainly interestingly, within a matter of days, I either saw John Pastore or he called me and told me about the meeting he'd had with Lyndon, and how he'd gone down to the White House and told the President that. And, of course, John Pastore was so short that if he had the stature of the President, boy,

he would really give the press hell and high water and everything else. And then he said the President adopted it, and I think John Pastore wanted to know if I'd seen it. And I said not only had I seen it, but I had complimented the President on the performance. So John Pastore took credit for it, but I never could get the President to go back to that form. I don't know why. I don't know why.

G: Did you give him some specific advice on utilizing a text as he described Kennedy doing without having to depend on it?

S: No, because what John Kennedy--Kennedy was a very quick reader. He was one of these people who could take a--I've seen him do it--memorandum and look at it and almost give you back word for word what was on it, and you didn't believe that he could possibly have read the first paragraphs. Johnson wasn't that kind of a reader. In fact, I think I told both Lady Bird and Lyndon that there wasn't anybody, in the short time that he was talking about, who could equip him for that kind of a quick speed reading and memory. And in some people you either have it or you don't. Other people can learn it. But from the time in that summer evening at that restaurant and the time of the convention, there was no way that he was going to be able to get on top of that.

G: Do you think part of his reluctance to debate may have been simply that he wanted to control more of the factors, and that in subjecting himself to a debate he simply wouldn't be able to--?

S: Well, I can't answer that, except that certainly his behavior on other things would indicate that he liked very much to be in control of the situation.

G: I have one question that goes back to 1956, and there was television coverage of a speech that he gave regarding Eisenhower's veto of the farm bill. Do you remember that? Apparently, he had some involvement with you on that score.

S: Probably did, but I don't recall it.

G: Okay. I want to raise three areas of CBS coverage of the war in Vietnam. The first is Morley Safer's broadcast in August 1965, which depicted the burning of a village. Do you remember that?

S: I certainly do.

G: Can you tell me, in essence, your perspective on that and decision to air that?

S: Well, I wasn't involved in it in any way. I didn't even know that it was coming up on the news.

G: Really?

S: I did see it. I certainly got all the fire and ire from the White House on it. Not only the White House, but when President Johnson sent me out to Vietnam and I went up to I Corps to visit--who was the marine general that was up there? [Lewis] Walt? I'm not sure that that's his name, but he refused to see me.

G: Is that right?

S: And the refusal was based on what he said was dishonest reporting on that incident. Absolutely never could find anything that pointed in the direction of anything but a straightforward news report. But short of being there and seeing it with my own eyes, I have to depend on other people in whom I have a lot of confidence. But there's no question that this was a very rough blow as far as the Pentagon was concerned. Also, no question in my mind about what had happened.

G: Did this represent a new, shall we say, bluntness in reporting on the war in Vietnam essentially?

S: I don't think so.

G: You don't?

S: No.

G: In other words, you feel that that kind of candid reporting had gone on before the Safer [broadcast]?

S: Yes, except that this was such a dramatic incident that it carried extra impact. But the directness of the reporting was just the same prior to that, and was later. I don't believe that anything was held back. So far as I know, nothing was held back, and certainly nothing was staged. But you have to remember that a television camera is a good bit like a flashlight in a dark room, that what it turns its light on is very dramatic just for the very act of being there and having the light on it.

But I never believed, in terms of watching what we did and in talking with our people, that is, I'm talking about people in CBS News, that we were ever trying to hype, or one way or the other, as far as the war was concerned. I know that Bill Moyers and certainly the President didn't agree with that, but that's the way I saw it, and that's the way I saw our job. You've got to remember that this is the first war that had the cameras in the battlefield, so to speak. My own feeling is that World War I and World War II would have been different wars if they'd have had television coverage. You had, in those wars, more control over what the press could report. But this was the first war that television really went right into the battlefield and brought it into your living room.

G: It has been noted that Lyndon Johnson himself was a viewer of the war on television, the news broadcasts. How did that affect him?

S: Abnormally, I thought.

G: Really?

S: Abnormally in the sense that I thought he paid too much attention to it. Anybody in his position has to be aware of what the public is being shown. But I felt at times that he paid too much attention to the picture on the tube. I can't give you specifics because I don't recall now what brought that to mind, but I do know that I told him on one occasion that I thought he could get too close to the press in terms of what it was doing, that he had to step back and take the longer view on things. Although I think I did say earlier that if there had been debates in 1964, I think the war would have been a lot shorter. And I still think that.

G: Let me ask you to develop that point just a little bit. It would have been shortened because--?

S: I think that in the rough and tumble of the Goldwater-Johnson debate, which never took place, I would think that Barry Goldwater would have taken positions *vis-à-vis* the war that would have driven President Johnson into taking positions that would have been in the direction of shortening the war, rather than prolonging it. I also think that one of the mistakes that was made in terms of the conduct of the war, not in terms of the field operation, but just in terms of policy, was that I think the idea that we could have guns and butter at the same time had the effect of prolonging the affair. I think that if once we were in it, to the extent that we ultimately became involved, if the President had invoked a very strict homefront support of the war effort that it would have brought the problem a

lot closer to the average person. There were a lot of people who looked upon the war out in the Pacific as something that was going on, but not something that was that close to them. That wasn't true when it was in Europe. You didn't have the ties to the European roots and so forth. The Pacific war was a much more remote war, but he could have made that much more a homefront affair if he had said, you know, there's going to be all kinds of rationing and everything else. Whether we needed it or not, some of those efforts, I think, would have dramatized the fact that we were involved in one hell of a war. And I think that would have had an impact on shortening the war, and I think that debates with Goldwater, where Goldwater would have taken a position opposite to what--I don't know what he would have done, but my guess is that he would have driven some points home that would have caused the President to rethink some of the things that I don't think were being rethought at that time.

G: The Fulbright hearings in 1966--how significant was this in terms of the public's perception of the war, do you think?

S: As I look back on it, I don't think they were that significant. I'm trying to recapture that period and, without doing some looking at my own notes and things of that period, I guess I've given you the only answer I can give you.

G: Okay. And finally, you touched briefly on this last time, but I'd like you to develop it in a little more detail: the Tet offensive and Walter Cronkite. You noted last time that the President felt that Cronkite's position on the war after Tet was a major factor in public opinion.

S: Well, not only was it a major factor, but I think it hit the President right between the eyes, and I think that was a very telling comment that Walter made after the Tet offensive. I

don't think there's a lot I can add to it, except that I know by what the President told me that this had a great impact on it. And yet again, I think that that goes partly to what I said just a little while ago, and that is that I think sometimes he paid too much attention to what one correspondent wrote from the field. Obviously, I'm not saying he shouldn't note what competent journalists report, but if you've got your plans on a goal, I think you have to set aside some of the temporary and passing comments to achieve the larger objective. But I don't want to go back into that period because--not that I'm opposed to going back into it, I just don't have the competence to really make the judgment that I'm giving you superficially.

I was not impressed by what I saw going on in Vietnam when I was out there in 196--whatever it was, that the President asked me to go out with--

G: You mean you were not impressed with the military progress?

S: With the military frankness. I thought that they did a snow job on Ep [Palmer] Hoyt and me and Frank Starzel, who was then, I guess, general manager of the AP. The three of us went out; you know, the President wanted three pairs of eyes to look around, so I didn't think we were getting to the bottom line on the thing. But I wasn't impressed by the conduct of what I saw, either. I don't mean there was improper conduct; I just felt that we had too many people with a willingness to do things that they couldn't accomplish because in a sense they had their hands tied behind them. They were limited in what they could do offensively, and as a result they were stepping on each other.

I think I spent a night at [William] Westmoreland's quarters, or at least I had dinner with him, but I've forgotten now whether I stayed the night with him or not. But he wasn't about to talk with me about how he felt about matters, and yet I got in the

briefings that he set up for Hoyt and Starzel and me. I thought we were getting just a superficial snow job. I didn't think we were getting a hard look at the situation at all.

G: President Johnson is known to have felt that the press turned what was a military victory at Tet into a psychological defeat at home. Do you think that that in fact is what happened in terms of the overall effect of the reporting?

S: I don't know. What happened at home? I have no question about what happened here. Whether that was the result of the press alone, I'm not prepared to say. And even if that were the fact, I don't know what would have motivated the press to have tried to do that. I don't think it was anybody--certainly, I know that nobody said to Walter Cronkite, "Take a negative attitude," or, "Take any other attitude than [the one] you develop as a result of being there." The only things that the guys were told was--

(Interruption)

G: You were talking Walter Cronkite's reporting and the fact that--

S: Well, what I was getting ready to say was that none of the CBS News people ever were given instructions on anything in the news area except to report it as accurately and as objectively as possible. My feeling was that you set the policies, you hired the best people and they did the job, and if you found them off base in terms of policy, you called them up and had a discussion with them on it. So that this is only by way of saying that there was no central participation with any of our news people about what attitudes to take about the war in Vietnam or, for that matter, covering a steel strike or anything else.

G: During the time that you were associating with Lyndon Johnson, did he ever have second thoughts about the way the war had been conducted or the policies that he had pursued? Would he have done something differently in retrospect?

S: I never was aware of any second thoughts on it. I remember Don Cook and I went down to see him on something one time at the White House, and Don expressed the view that he ought to get out of Vietnam as quickly as possible, and my recollection is that Lyndon was rather hostile in that context. And I mention that only because later Don called me to tell me that he had been down on something and that they had gone up into the bedroom. And Don had taken, again, the negative view on Vietnam, or the positive view about getting out, and the President was so annoyed with Don, I guess is one way to put it, that he reached back and turned the light out on his bed and that was the end of the interview. That was the last time Don Cook ever saw the President. Cook was terribly shaken by that, what he considered to be a very rude and unpleasant termination of what Don thought was a friendly, although serious, discussion about Vietnam. And Don only bothered to call me the morning after that had happened because he was outraged by it and recalled the earlier meeting when the three of us had talked about the same thing.

G: It does point to the fact that there were people like Cook and yourself who didn't seem to have reluctance to offer him an opinion that was contrary to his own.

S: Even though I knew that his long, long arm would wring my neck or punch a hole in my shoulder--and I say that only in joking, but he could be pretty emphatic when he was in an argument with you--it never bothered me. I guess I felt that I was a free and independent guy. But I know there were people who didn't want to invoke his ire, but that never troubled me on anything.

G: Let me ask you about another area of CBS reporting, and that was the dramatic program on hunger in America. Do you recall that? I believe it was--

S: Ed [Edward R.] Murrow narrated it. Yes, I do recall it in more ways than one.

G: Describe that, if you will, from your viewpoint.

S: Well, this was, I thought, a very effective job of reporting. I say I remember it in more ways than one not only because I thought it was an effective broadcast, but because Orville Freeman, I believe, was terribly upset by the broadcast. In fact, I think there's probably something in the file of an exchange I had with him about it. And shortly after that, Ed Murrow went to head USIA [United States Information Agency]. The BBC, by contract with us--us meaning CBS--had available to it all of our news and all of our public affairs programming. And they paid us a substantial fee to have first call on anything we did, and one of the things they wanted was *Harvest of Shame*. And the director general of the BBC, whose name escapes me now, was a famous correspondent from World War II; he was a German correspondent for the BBC. [He] was the director general, and he called me on the phone in a very unhappy frame of mind because he said that the State Department was preventing the BBC from showing *Harvest of Shame*, and interfering with our contractual arrangement, and [asked] what could I do about it. I didn't know anything about it until he told me about it--that is, until he, the director general, told me about it.

And the net of it was that the State Department had been instructed by Murrow, the director of USIA, to go to the BBC and tell them they couldn't run it. I told Hugh--can't think of his last name--as far as I was concerned, he should play it and there wasn't anything that the United States government could do to stop him. I knew that I was crossing swords with Murrow, and that's why I said that I remember a lot of things about that broadcast, more of the things surrounding it than the actual broadcast itself, which I saw at least twice and had no fault with it as far as the broadcast was concerned.

[I] can understand why Freeman didn't like it and I can understand why the BBC wanted to show it.

G: Did they ultimately show it?

S: Oh, they showed it, sure. And to Ed's credit, he went before his organization in Washington and apologized for having tried to block it. It was remarkable to me how quickly the journalist changed from being the fire-eating journalist to the man that didn't want certain things shown when he was on the other side of the desk.

G: I gather the same transformation takes place in print, too, where you'll have a journalist who will become an editor and change attitudes. Is that the case, or is it unique to broadcasting?

S: No, no. Well, it's true with businessmen who say to hell with the government and so forth, until they get into a government job, and then they start wanting to push industry around. Oh no, this isn't unique to journalism. But I've seen it in two or three cases. In fact, we had the rule at CBS News that if anyone was having anything to do with somebody in government that they had to get off the air; they could not continue. And Charlie Collingwood was advising Averell Harriman, long-time friends, on Harriman's interest in getting the nomination when Harriman was still governor of the state of New York. That policy caused Charlie to get off the air until he decided what he was going to do.

G: Was your own friendship with Lyndon Johnson a potential conflict here?

S: Yes.

G: Tell me how you resolved that.

S: I didn't resolve it. I told you the last time, or in one of our meetings, how it began. It was a growing relationship that, if I had been closer to the day-to-day journalism of CBS, I would have broken the relationship. But even as president of the company, I felt at times that I had to step back and disengage, as far as internal things were concerned, because of my conversations with the President. It was an uncomfortable feeling, and I think any publisher or network broadcast executive has to think that through very carefully. And if I had had forward vision that was as good as hindsight, I probably would not have allowed myself to be drawn in as close as I was. And yet, if I were in Lyndon's shoes, and I wasn't, of course, I can understand why he wanted to be friendly with somebody who he thought would give him an honest answer and be loyal to him. But I certainly never got close enough to him that I accepted the appointment that he wanted me to take, and things of that kind. So I did distance myself in that sense.

G: I guess the logical extension is almost putting all civic involvement or all activities beyond, in this case CBS, on hold. Did you feel, in effect, that here was one extreme out here that would require you to give up what you felt were useful contributions to, in this case, the President? I mean did you weigh that--

S: Well, that's the tough question. You hate to deny a man his friendships just because he's changed his job. And yet it gets awfully close to that. Or the other side of that coin would be I'd have to get out of my job and go to work for him, and I wasn't prepared to do that. In fact, I think it would have been a mistake, for him as well as for me.

G: One other question on the *Harvest of Shame*: did the President ever react to that program?

S: Never to my recollection. I don't believe that he ever--that's one he didn't corner me on.

G: The program is generally credited with having an impact in terms of the Congress and dealing with the actual problem of hunger in this country. Do you feel that it was a--

S: That important?

G: Yes.

S: Yes, I do. And I think there have been others like that. There was one done recently on the plight of the Negro family, or the black family, in American society that I thought was just--viewing it as I did within the past year or so, I remembered *Harvest of Shame* as being something akin to it when I saw it. And there was one the other night on Afghanistan that I thought was the same kind of a broadcast, and yet I haven't heard a thing about it. I've asked a dozen or so people that I thought would have seen it and would have reacted and, a) they didn't see it, and when I described it and said I'd send them a tape of it, they weren't even interested in seeing it. There is that little interest in the thing.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

G: I want to ask you about the publication of *The Vantage Point* and the Walter Cronkite series of interviews with Lyndon Johnson. Let me ask you to just recount your role in both of these developments.

S: Well, I had a role. I don't know that mine was all that important, but I certainly, early on, talked to both the President and Lady Bird about getting their memoirs published by one of our publishing companies at that time. And [I] certainly talked with the President and his close adviser in the movie field--who am I talking about?

G: Arthur Krim?

S: Arthur Krim. Krim represented the President in negotiations, with me at least, about both the book and the television interviews.

G: Whose idea was it to have a series of television interviews?

S: Mine.

G: Let me ask you to describe your reasoning, what you hoped to achieve with this.

S: I thought that as a postscript to a man's period in the presidency, a quiet series of discussions about the problems he faced and how he saw his job and accomplishments was a contribution to the public's understanding not only the man, but what had taken place during his period in the White House. This wasn't the first time we'd done this. We did it with Truman; we did it with President Eisenhower. Ed Murrow went down to Key West and talked, as I recall, with President Truman for the better part of two days. And that's all on tape. This was a follow-on to that, and I believe that the Truman interviews grew out of a proposal that I had made on a broader scale that we ought to interview as many world leaders as we could, to build up a library of reflections and discussions from the viewpoint of having been there and now free to talk, and so forth. And we even tried to do that with a series of business executives who finished their tour of duty as the head of a big company, to talk about their responsibilities to society, and so forth. So this wasn't anything new.

G: Were the other series you referred to conducted? Did you do some other leaders--?

S: Oh, you mean the Truman thing and the others?

G: Well, no, not Truman and Eisenhower, but other heads of state or--?

S: No. I think those were done on a one-time basis; we didn't do a series. But we've got footage that I'd be glad to share with you over at the broadcast center on a lot of people.

G: In the Walter Cronkite interviews, Lyndon Johnson comes across as he didn't come across on television while he was president. He did seem more relaxed and informal and much more compelling. Why is that? What was the difference?

S: Well, I can think of three reasons. One, he was no longer on the firing line. I think once you've been through it, you are more relaxed. Two, I believe that Walter has the quality of being able to sit down and talk with you and draw out a reflective kind of response. And I don't remember now what my third point was. (Laughter) Yes, I guess what I was getting ready to say was, I think that once having been in the job and now out, knowing that having had the experience of the job and knowing that nothing is going to depend upon what you might say one way or another--I don't say this pejoratively, but I think you have more freedom to talk once you're not aspiring to another political campaign or another office. So I think there is a relaxed mood, and I think as you got in those instances with Walter and the President, you saw him more like he is when you sat and talked with him. And Walter, I think, could elicit that from the President. But I think if you'd have sat down and said to the President, "I'm going to put the camera over here and just sort of talk to it about how you saw things when you were in the Oval Office," a lot of that would have come through that way, because he was no longer under the gun.

G: After having made the arrangements, did you have any role in the actual conduct of the interviews?

S: Not in the conduct of the interviews, but I went down--I believe for the first one I went to the Ranch. I believe the first one was done at the Ranch and I was down there for that. I don't think I was down for any others but, you know, that contract was never fulfilled. Not through any deliberate act on his part, but because of circumstances, he didn't do all

the interviews that I think we had contemplated. And I think we had a second book that we were committed to, and we didn't get that, either. But Arthur Krim handled the arrangements financially, and certainly I initiated them. And when Arthur wasn't satisfied with the interviews and so forth, it landed on my desk.

G: What was the problem with the interviews?

S: I don't recall now. I know that Arthur felt we had pressed too hard on something. I've forgotten what it was, but I know he was in and out of my office, and we were on the phone and so forth, but I don't--

G: Was there a question of editing that bothered him or that bothered LBJ, do you think?

S: No. I don't recall it was editing. We had the right--I don't think he had any rights on the editing at all. That's the last thing I would give anyone, whether it's the president or some other public figure. I don't think you can turn over the editing to them. Now, it might be a condition that you wouldn't get somebody. And that's the great advantage of doing a live broadcast, then you don't face that problem. I think even Lyndon Johnson tried to edit retroactively on something that we did--for the life of me I can't recall now what it was but I think, again, he was on the phone with me at home about wanting something not to be on that he had said. It had been a taped interview.

G: Was this during the White House or subsequently?

S: Yes, during the White House. And I believe that I said to him that if he told me as president that this would impact national security, I would honor his request; if not, I couldn't honor it.

G: What did he say to that?

S: I don't recall. I think he said--I'm not sure, I'm not sure which way it came down, but I know it wasn't any *cause célèbre*. The only thing I can say was that if the chief executive tells me that he misspoke himself and not in terms of the facts, but in terms of the propriety, in connection with the international security situation, I have to honor that. Now, some people wouldn't, but that was my code.

G: You wonder if that doesn't happen more often, or maybe it does.

S: It's something that I never wanted to talk about very much because I didn't want to encourage others to try to do it.

G: But does it happen more than the public is aware, do you think?

S: I don't think so. But it has happened. Of course, in the early days, you didn't have that problem because you didn't record. It's only the miserable problems that you get into because there's a tape recording. And if I were the victim, in the sense that I had been the subject of the interview and wanted to take something back, I would never be sure that it was taken back. It wouldn't be, maybe, on the broadcast that was planned, but some place that piece of tape exists. And in many ways you're better off to say, "I said it, I'll go with it." Because then if it's ever discovered, it's a big cause when maybe it didn't deserve to be a big cause in the first place.

G: The other aspect of this post-presidential deal was the publication of the memoirs, both the President's and Mrs. Johnson's *A White House Diary*. Can you finish this topic?

S: Sure.

G: Was *The Vantage Point* what you had expected it to be?

S: No, I expected more. It struck me as having had a lot of the life taken out of it by rewriting and editing and so forth. No, I didn't get the Lyndon Johnson that I thought I was buying.

G: Did you discuss that problem with him?

S: No. No. It was too late then to. . . . And I have to say I didn't think we got in Lady Bird the material that I thought was in those tapes that she did in the bedroom there at night. And I can understand why she pulled back. But that's the trouble. When you begin to edit, you take the personality out of the property. And certainly Lyndon did with his. It's too bad, but that's the way it is, and we all do it. I know that I've been cleaning out my files because I'm getting ready to move, and I'm finding things that I wrote and said, "Gee, I would like to have written it differently." But it's very tempting to soften some things and embellish other things. And I don't accuse Lyndon of having embellished anything; I just think he took a lot of the heart out of it.

G: Was this, do you think, a need that he felt to be, quote, "presidential," rather than--?

S: Yes. A need to be loved, a need to try to be nicer than he was, in that sense.

G: Was there a discussion of doing an additional volume? Doing one on his Senate years, for example, or his early years?

S: Oh, there was a discussion of doing more than one book. I don't recall now what the--I've really forgotten. I remember very clearly that we were talking more than one book, and I don't recall now how they were to be divided. But certainly he had more than one book in him. It was just a matter of having time to do it.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III

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