

SAM V. STONE INTERVIEW

PB: May 29, 1968. We are in the office of Judge Sam V. Stone of Georgetown in the County Court House of Williamson County. Judge Stone, first of all, we like to have the person being interviewed to tell a little of his own background.

SVS: Mr. Bolton, as a child my family lived in Austin County which is now of course in the same representative district as Williamson County. I have lived in Georgetown since 1905, moving to Georgetown for the purpose of going to the public schools and then to the University here, Southwestern, where my father attended many years before. He thought it was a very fine place to rear a family of four boys. So, after our high school and college career there was no demand much for my services because I took only an academic degree and had no particular skill of any kind, so I went then to a business school and came back and began my work as a bookkeeper at the Georgetown Oil Mill where I remained until about 1917, when I then joined the army and went to Kelly Field in San Antonio for six weeks training. I had never known any of the army life but this thing was an emergency, it appeared, and they had to train some officers ready to take over

a number of raw recruits, who had all volunteered in the air service branch of the Army. All of them thinking possibly they would have an air plane to fly, but they found that they had shovels and boots and had to dig ditches. Since I was not good at that either they made a construction squadron out of my organization. The Commanding Officer at Kelly Field in San Antonio assigned to me 150 men and told me to organize a squadron. Any one of the 150 men knew about as much about organizing a squadron as I did, but they didn't know any more, so I took the "bull by the horns" and asked the group to line up, and asked all men from Texas to step forward two paces, and from these men I appointed my non-commissioned officers. And they turned out to be good ones.

PB: You mean you picked your non-coms out of the rank of Texans? What was your rank?

SVS: My rank was First Lieutenant and I attended O.C.S. for only, believe it was six weeks, and was commissioned as First Lieutenant in the Signal Corps. This experience which was more profitable than the schooling in that particular branch of the service because it was in the Aviation Section. At that time the Army had no air force so I was in the Signal Corps but they later changed it to the Air Force and I was then commissioned in the Air Force and finally became a Captain in the Air Force.

PB: Did you get overseas?

SVS: Yes, overseas training in England for about six months and had a very fine experience, and I enjoyed the English people a great deal. We were pretty heavily involved there with work because we were attached to British Troops in order that our troops may learn something from them because since our Air Force was rather elementary at that time, while the British had been fighting four years, and what we learned about maintaining a squadron of air planes was learned over there and not in this country.

PB: After the war you came back to Georgetown?

SVS: Yes, came back to Georgetown in 1919 and went back to work at my former job. There was still not too much demand for people who didn't know some skill and I went back to the Oil Mill. There Mr. M. F. Smith, the mayor of Georgetown, was operating it, and he was very kind to me and I was promoted to Assistant Manager and then later to Manager, but Mr. Smith really maintained his interest. He was, you might say, Chairman of the Board and I was the manager and remained there until about 1922. I organized the American Legion here in Georgetown and also in the County at that time. In 1922 there were four or five people very much interested in the Tax

Collector's race of the County and I decided that I might try my wings on that. I believe there were five in the race and we had a run-off election and I won by less than a hundred votes to win my first elective office.

PB: Okay, then you served as Tax Collector how long?

SVS: Twelve years. And remained in that office until the Tax Collectors Office and the Tax Assessors Office were consolidated. Then the County Judge's Office became vacant--the incumbent did not choose to run again, so I "pitched my hat into the ring." We had a one-legged tax assessor which was a pretty serious handicap for anyone to run against so I went into another contest and was elected County Judge, and have had one opponent since that time, and that was in 1935, when first elected to the office.

PB: And you are still County Judge?

SVS: Still County Judge, yes sir.

PB: Perhaps we should explain here and for the benefit of people who may not be too familiar with the Texas law the fact that you, although not a lawyer, can be a County Judge.

SVS: That's correct, and I had studied law but in 1937 or '38 I went to what I call, and you will recall this person too, "Mrs. Sanbo's University" over at Austin where

young lawyers went to get their training when they did not attend law schools or University of Texas.

PB: And you have a law degree now?

SVS: Not a degree, but I have a license.

PB: I mean a license.

SVS: Yes.

PB: That's equivalent of a degree--every lawyer has to have a license.

SVS: Yes, that's right.

PB: He doesn't have to have a degree but he does have to have a license.

SVS: And by the way, that was about the last group that were allowed to go to take the Bar exam without some legal education in a University or Law School.

PB: Is that right? I didn't know that. Now, Judge, that brings us down to about 1937 and the death of the Congressman for this District, Congressman J. P. Buchanan. Was it Buh-kannon or Beu-kannon, which did you call it?

SVS: Buh-kannan, we knew him here as Buchanan. He was from Washington County and was a good friend of my family who were originally from Washington County.

PB: And the special election was held to replace Congressman Buchanan and you were one of the candidates in that race.

SVS: That's right.

PB: And another of the candidates was the man that is now the President of these United States, Lyndon Johnson.

SVS: Yes, sir.

PB: How did you happen to run in the race, Judge?

SVS: Well, it was a "free-for-all" and there was to be no run-off in it, and I thought possibly with so many people running from Travis County that I might have a chance to pile up a pretty good vote from Williamson County and maybe then from the fringes I might have had enough to be ahead of any one of the group, but I misjudged that considerably because Lyndon Baines Johnson was the man who had a head start on things and had been doing considerable work for the administration at that time in the area and also he had been accumulating experience in Congress and knew his way around in politics.

PB: I believe secretary to one of the Congressmen in Washington, Congressman Kleberg.

SVS: I believe that is correct. And he was a very astute young fellow who was very energetic, and he really knew where he wanted to go and he really went to that top spot.

PB: Tell us something about campaign methods back in '37.

SVS: Well, we did some newspaper advertising but most of it was personal contacts we tried to make, all over the

District. It was a very strenuous sort of thing because the campaign was rather short. Representative Buchanan died, I think, probably in early March, 1937, and the election was set for the first part of April. So there was only about four or five weeks in which to get about. So Mr. C. N. Avery of Austin, a well-known person over the District, and Polk Shelton, another well-known attorney in Austin, and Merton Harris of Smithville, and of course they all had more funds than I had and it was pretty hard on me because I had to run on a very light budget for that matter, and there was no contributions then like there has been since, so I had to run on a shoestring deal and the shoestring was pretty short. I remember one thing, that our friends were very kind to me. They introduced a resolution in several meetings over the County asking me, and suggesting that I run, which was of course very encouraging and flattering, to think people would like for me to be their Congressman. I gave everything I had to it and came out not at the bottom but about a third--about a third down the line, I think it was.

PB: I don't recall--I don't have the figures before me, but I believe it was some place in that area.

SVS: I will say, though, that I beat the President in my own County.

PB: In Williamson County.

SVS: Yes, Williamson County.

PB: Yes. What were the do you recall, what were the issues in that campaign?

SVS: At that time, if you recall, we were having the beginning of the dam building situation in the major rivers of Texas and two of which came through the District the Brazos and also the Colorado came through this Representative's District. The matter of soil conservation and those things were high on the project program in Congress at that time; and, for the general good of the people after a pretty disastrous depression we needed jobs for lots of unemployed people through the country. They were doing WPA work at that time, you will recall, and we had a lot of it going on here. The youth group and NYA, which Mr. Johnson at that time was a State Director, I believe, and he was seeing a lot of people and was helping a lot of youths get started, who otherwise would not probably have been able to do very much except over a long period of time. Of course, the administration did a lot of work here in this County and through the sponsorship of our County, much employment was furnished.

PB: In other words, you were, as County Judge, you were all mixed up in the welfare work in the County, too, WPA

and NYA and all that. Had you met Mr. Johnson?

SVS: I had met him on one or two occasions, but I didn't know him personally. He was a young man at that time, that being 1930, 37 years ago, something like that, and he was quite a young man, alert, active and ambitious.

PB: Well, you were quite a young man.

SVS: Well, I was almost mature though, then.

PB: Judge, let's get back for a moment to the issues. It is well known that Mr. Johnson at that time of being the State Director of the NYA was ran on a platform of support for the administration. What was your position in that respect?

SVS: Well, I was favorable toward that administration all along. I knew that Mr. Johnson had the inside track on that because he was a personal friend of Mr. Roosevelt. I don't know that Mr. Roosevelt did anything personally for him except that the mere fact that Texas was pretty much of a Roosevelt state at that time and naturally his contact with him, I think, was a great deal in his favor as a candidate.

PB: Well, some of the candidates didn't seem to feel that it was very much of a Roosevelt state. They for instance, the court-packing plan, as they call it that was one of the big issues, was it not?

SVS: Yes, it was. They defeated that, of course, I don't know exactly now from this long time past just what the state or who was active in the state, in regard to defeating his Supreme Court Plan. I suppose it was the representatives and senators and people, too, but I don't know just what their positions were.

PB: Well, that, of course, is right. But in the campaign I know that Mr. Shelton, one of the candidates from Austin, told me that his campaign was built upon an anti-court packing issue. Did you take a position on that in your

SVS: No, I didn't other than I thought that possibly if nine men were good, why then a few more might be better to interpret the thought and the feeling of the nation better.

PB: In your you had many contacts with the Federal Government as County Judge in NYA and, by the way, when did you first see Mr. Roosevelt?

SVS: Well, back in the years when the Democratic Convention was brought to Houston--when Al Smith was a candidate, then I recall attending that meeting and also the day that Mr. Roosevelt presented his name to the Convention, and I was very much impressed with him at that time.

PB: You were a delegate from Williamson County?

SVS: Not a delegate--nor alternate down there, but attended several of the sessions, as a spectator.

PB: Well, you got in the Convention, then?

SVS: Yes.

PB: Well, that's, of course, beside the point. Now, coming back to this campaign in which we are primarily interested, did you make any speeches or did you have campaign rallies or just how did you go about

SVS: Yes, we did. We had a rally in Taylor one night and my friend Stanton Allan from Bartlett, who was really an outstanding lawyer, volunteered to introduce me that night and we had a rain and storm there, and the rally played out before it got started. But other times we had a parade of cars, or rather a group of cars that went all over the District in a couple of days with the music, and that sort of thing, to attract the people and get the people interested in my candidacy.

PB: Was there very much interest in the race? Did there seem to be

SVS: No, I don't think there was. It came so quickly, and it was over so fast that people didn't get heated up to it very much until toward the very last and then those who had more means at their disposal than I had, put on a better show than I could afford.

PB: Of course, there wasn't any television in those days, but did you use radio any?

SVS: Yes, I made two or three radio speeches from Austin, and I don't know how well they were received, but I got, I reckon, about as many votes as I deserved. I had a lot of personal friends in Austin they got out and did some work for me, and other places as well.

PB: Now Williamson County does not have a daily paper and Travis County does have. Was, in your opinion, were the Austin papers did they present the

SVS: Well, I think they were a little biased, probably on account of the several people from Austin in the race, and they had more influence, of course, on the papers than I had because I had no contact whatsoever; I was just a country boy out here in another county.

PB: Didn't even have a press agent.

SVS: No. Not a press agent, but a campaign manager, who did furnish a few stories to the Press.

PB: I can't imagine a campaign nowadays without at least a press agent.

SVS: Well, I had a what you could call part-time press agent. I've forgotten his name now. He came down from Dallas and worked with me about a couple of weeks and got something about me in the paper. You almost have to have someone to do that for you.

PB: Did you have any contact during the campaign with Mr. Johnson? Did you hear any of the speeches he made?

SVS: I'm sure I must have heard some of his talks. I don't recall now. They were very short as a rule at that time. They were not very long speeches and they were not dressed up affairs like they are now, but they were and they weren't too many people, I guess, listening to radio then like they are to television now, so it was and so many people didn't have sets, for that matter.

PB: Radio sets, is that right?

SVS: In the country they didn't

PB: After the campaign, Judge Stone, after the returns were in showing that Mr. Johnson had been elected to the Congress, when was your next contact with Mr. Johnson?

SVS: Well, he would come down to his District, and he was a pretty thorough politician in that when he came back to his representative precinct here in Texas, why, he would make trips around and we would see him and I recall a number of times I saw him and he was always more cordial and I began to feel pretty soon after I saw the type of work he was having to do and how he worked at it, that perhaps I was better off by not having won the election because I was still pursuing my even tenor of my ways here with people that I knew and I wasn't quite so sure about the people that I had to deal with in the Congress

of the United States, because most of them had had a lot of experience in that sort of thing and I didn't.

PB: Well, let me get one thing straight right there. You mean that when Johnson came back, when Mr. Johnson came back to his Congressional District, did he look you up or

SVS: Oh, yes, we visited. I mean, just a when we'd not a special visit, but I mean if he was in Georgetown, shy, I'd see him, or if I was in Austin and saw him, why, we'd have visits together.

PB: There were no animosities over the campaign?

SVS: Oh, no. None whatsoever. Fact of the matter is, we took a trip after World War II when you could get gasoline and a car that you were not afraid to get out of the county with, we went to Washington with my wife and two boys and I wrote Lyndon as Congressman that I was coming up there and there was a few things that I wanted to see about our Government and that sort of thing, and he made all the arrangements that I asked for and not only that, when we arrived, why he called my hotel immediately and insisted that the family come out and have dinner with them on that evening or the next evening, and we were a little reluctant to do that because we knew he was a busy person and probably had other people and other

engagements too, but he insisted so, and he just didn't take no for an answer and he sent his car by and just took us out there, and we had a very delightful evening.

PB: He is a hard man to say no to.

SVS: Yes, he is.

PB: What in those days, discounting the fact that he has now gone on and was elected to the Presidency, what was your summary, you see lots of people in your work as County Judge and are pretty good judge of character, what was your judgment on Mr. Johnson?

SVS: Well, I thought all along that he was probably the best prepared man to go into the Presidency that we've had in a long, long time, and in fact, I knew on account of his long and varied experience that he'd had, and his contact with so many of the leaders of the nation and he stood up with them and evidently they had a lot of confidence in him and we here had confidence in him as well, and I felt that we were very fortunate in having him as President at the time.

PB: Judge, of course, I had reference really thank you for that but I had reference really to the earlier days when you first got to know him there after the 1937 campaign. Was there any contact between you and the Congressman's office that led you to make any sort of appraisal of his ability?

SVS: Not particularly. You know we were not calling upon our representatives then as much as we are since that time, and there are a few little matters that concerned some of my friends--and some of our mutual friends that I would contact him about and he was always very willing to cooperate.

PB: Do you have any specific case in mind that you could tell about?

SVS: Yes, one little girl here from Georgetown whose mother was reared in Johnson City and knew Lyndon pretty well, she was going to Europe, and was making application as a teacher to go to Europe after the war, in Germany, and he was very instrumental in giving her this opportunity.

PB: Judge, I want to ask you about something that perhaps is outside of your jurisdiction, but I'm sure you are familiar with. For a good many years a custom has grown up of Williamson County entertaining their Congressman once each year at a big party. What can you tell us about that?

SVS: Yes, Wilson Fox who used to be in the Texas Legislature, and by the way is the man I defeated--the only man who ran against me and I defeated him for County Judge.

PB: Is that right!

SVS: But we've always been good friends. He has a ranch out here on the San Gabriel River. He has been very much

interested in a dam at Laneport because it will help his area down there to some degree. And Wilson and Roman Bartosh have gone together over the years to entertain the Congressmen, and I met Mr. Johnson down there on several occasions and as well as Homer Thornberry later, Jake Pickle and all the Congressmen from this District. They have an annual get-together down there and serve meals and have tremendous crowds there and I think these families look forward to it, not only those they are honoring but the rest of them that can get there to see those people. They have from a thousand to two thousand people down there on those evenings.

PB: Virtually every person in a state office is there, too.

SVS: Yes. They do. Judges and other state officers as well attend those meetings on the Wilson Fox Ranch.

PB: Judge, I take it from what you've told me that you were pretty much of a Roosevelt man, and how about his successor in office, Mr. Truman?

SVS: Well, a lot of people considered Mr. Truman a mediocre President, but I considered him one of the greatest presidents we've had. I think he made the greatest decision that any President was ever called on to make when he asked the boys to drop that bomb in Japan and

end that war over there. I think it took a lot of what you need to have, to do that sort of thing and he thought it was the thing to do, and he certainly ended a war there mighty quick.

PB: Did you ever meet Mr. Truman?

SVS: Yes. By the way, he was through Georgetown on his second campaign, and Mr. Johnson was with him one time and the train stopped out at the Katy Station, and as usual they have a band there and unfortunately the band played nearly all of the time the train was stopped and no one could hear the President. Mr. Johnson asked me to come on back to the train and I shook hands with Mr. Truman, and we had a short visit together there. And I have a picture of that, by the way, which I treasure very highly, having two presidents in my presence at one time.

PB: Well, one of the Presidents in the picture you showed me you couldn't see him very well.

SVS: No, that was the only time that I got ahead of Mr. Johnson. He was behind me, and he didn't show up too well.

PB: Thank you very much, Judge Stone. You've been quite helpful.

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By Sam Stoebe

to the

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