

INTERVIEW I

DATE: December 4, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: PAUL THORNHILL

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mr. Thornhill's home, Oak Hill, Texas

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

G: When did you begin flying for Vice President Johnson? It was for Vice President that you began?

T: Yes, it was in September or October of 1962.

G: How did you get that job?

T: I was selected to fly with Jim Cross. Cross was a captain at the time and I was a captain and he had flown Vice President Johnson several times on the Jet Star. Jet Star, you know, was [a] fairly new aircraft in our wing there at SAM [Special Air Mission]. They came out in 1961, late 1960 and 1961. And Cross had flown Johnson several times and Cross married a local Austin girl. In conversations, the Vice President at that time learned these things about Jim and he liked Jim so he went to the secretary of defense and asked if he could have a Jet Star. Of course it had to be approved by President Kennedy and they finally agreed that yes, he could have a Jet Star. So he picked Cross to be his pilot [and] Cross picked me to be his co-pilot.

G: Had he known you before?

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T: Yes. Jim and I were together back over at Dover, Delaware. We'd known each other since about 1955, flown together in C-124s and Cross transferred to SAM, which was at Bolling Air Force Base at the time, about maybe a year or so ahead of me. Then I transferred over there and he picked me and I wasn't even qualified in the aircraft so he sent me down to Marietta, Georgia, Lockheed School, went through the ground school and got flight training and I was checked out in the aircraft. But there was nothing in writing saying that we are--you are designated as vice president's crew. It was just a verbal thing. At least I don't have any copy of anything. Now Cross might have.

G: You were simply assigned to the special air missions, is that the right terminology, special air missions?

T: That's right. But we flew--Cross and I were set aside and at that time they had several other crews designated like Secretary of Air Force, [Eugene] Zuckert, he had his own crew, and right on down the line then. And only this crew flew him, or in our case only Cross and I flew Johnson. There were only--the aircraft was designed for two pilots, it was an executive type aircraft, I'm sure you're familiar with the name. It's a four engine jet, eight passengers. I as the co-pilot had to fuel the airplane, I mean physically get up on the wing, fuel the airplane, and as we said back in those days we'd wake it up in the morning and put it to bed at night. I ramrodded the coffee, the rat-cheese for Johnson [inaudible] the stewards we had were more or less a personal valet, Paul Glenn, he stayed with the Vice President. So I filed a flight plan, the clearance, Cross was the pilot but he was close to the secret service and to the Vice President, with them the staff.

G: So the care and maintenance of the aircraft was your baby.

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T: That's right. Then, later on, Johnson wanted more people and for some reason he wanted thirteen seats and so they redesigned the whole fleet. We had eleven Jet Stars. They redesigned them for thirteen people.

G: All of them?

T: Yes.

G: This is when he became president, is that right?

T: No, he's still vice president and we also added an engineer; re-engineered it for a seat between the pilot and co-pilot for a flight engineer and we added an engineer then. Then he took over the duties of refueling the airplane and I still took care of the clearances and the flight plans and that sort of thing. I was also weight and balance officer for the wing at the time so when he wanted more seats and we added this flight engineer, of course that made the airplane nose-heavy because you're adding another hundred to hundred and eighty pounds up front. So they sent me down to Marietta and I got together with the Lockheed people and their engineers and we came up with a weight and balance form. My operations officer said he'd like to have everything on one sheet of paper, list all eleven aircrafts by the number and the basic weight and then the zero-fuel weight and then the gross weight and then add the passengers to come up with a maximal viable gross weight. It took quite a doing, but we came up with it and I did it and came back, presented to him, and they bought it.

G: How did you compensate for that nose heaviness?

T: By adding up in what they call in that Jet Star up at the tail section there's a speed brake, drops down and has little stairs there and you climb up in the back and they call that the

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boiler room because it gets a little over two hundred degrees. It's hot up in there and we added a ballast. We added a spare wheel, and tire, hydraulic fluid, engine oil and other parts to compensate for that. And then we had a list by seats of so much weight in each seat. Of course, the President weighed, what, two hundred and some pounds, way over two hundred pounds, and he's going to sit where he wants to sit. They had a VIP desk in there and a seat that slid and swiveled and they assumed that he'd always sit there, but that wasn't always the case. He'd sit where he wanted to sit so we just ignored and you just fly; you just go.

G: Were you in any way approaching the tolerance of the aircraft for weight or so on?

T: Oh, yes. Yes. Many times you might be right at that max allowable, but it was a good--still flying--it's a good airplane and it was safe. We didn't do anything that was way out of line that was really dangerous or anything like that.

G: Well is there a built-in safety factor or tolerance?

T: Oh yes, sure there is. There's a design safety factor.

G: You were never particularly concerned about taking off with a full load or anything of that sort?

T: To the point where it would be dangerous, no.

G: Were you on the trip when the Vice President went down to greet the astronaut--one of the first astronauts who came down and the weather was so bad?

T: No.

G: That may have been before your--

T: Jim Cross was.

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G: I knew there was such a trip. I thought maybe you had gone.

T: In this period, see, in our squad or wing we had two squadrons and originally the 1299th, the squadron that I was in, was so-called the state side. We were stationed at Bolling and at that time we were flying C-131s and they had some U-4s and they had a helicopter because of Eisenhower, a previous president. The other squadron, the so-called four-engine squadron, was over at Andrews. Actually it was at Washington National and it went to Andrews. Then they closed Bolling and moved everything to Andrews, consolidated everything and then this is in--my, gosh, I went over there in 1959 and then we moved to Andrews somewhere around--must have been 1960 or 1961, somewhere in that area. But anyway, if the Vice President was going to fly like an overseas trip it would be by the other squadron, not by us, so we just flew him state side. It's kind of hard to go back and think of all these things [that were] what was going on back there then.

G: You're primarily a multiengine pilot, is that right?

T: Yes.

G: Did you graduate from single engine to multiengine?

T: I did. I graduated from single engine flying school at Mariana, Florida, March 25, 1943, when I won my wings, pinned my wings on. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I was single at the time and had gone down through England at the gunnery school but at that time we had thirteen choices and started out with like a single engine fighter and they had that old Bellair Cobra P-39, they made a dive bomber out of it, they had that on there and then they had the twin-engine fighter, which was pursuit at that time, they weren't called

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fighter, they were pursuit. P-38, twin engine. Anyway, the thirteenth choice was ATC, Air Transport Command. And that's what about a third of my class were assigned to and we didn't like it and we tried to get it changed, but we couldn't get it changed. They said they needed pilots in transport. Which, for me, it probably was a good thing. I graduated in March of 1943 and of course they gave us a ten-day leave, ten-day delay *en route* from Mariana, Florida, to Miami, Florida. Went down TWA [Trans World Airlines], went through TWA C-47 school which was a big transport back in those days, the old gooney bird. Went from there, made two trips down to South America with TWA, picked up a few flying hours, and we just floated around and for a while they just sent us from there out to--I never could figure out why.

From there we went to Western Airlines at Salt Lake City, C-47. I don't understand why. Went through ground school again, flight training out there again, ended up at Reno, went through C-46, which was still twin-engine and my goodness, somewhere in there, I don't know exactly how, but I flew a B-24. I'd never been in one before. They sent me over there up at Kimball, Nebraska, I believe it was. Had a base up in there and picked up a few hours of four-engine time and next thing you know I'm a four-engine pilot. (Laughter) Things were done a little differently back in those days. The war was going on and I remember we ended up in Milwaukee, sat up there for a long time in a big pool deciding what to do. Gosh, a number of pilots up there. I ended up ferrying aircraft, ferry command at Wilmington, Delaware, and ferried a few B-25s all over the country, a couple of them overseas, took a B-24 over and they kicked us over

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there that time. We stayed. That was over into India, flying the hump then, B-24 tankers.

I got out of the service in December 1945. Had a break in the state reserve, I had about a five year break and got recalled in mid-May of 1951. I went in the hospital [inaudible] down a B-24 over in--call it C-109 carrying gas over the hump for--we had five different bases that we flew into in China and on one trip we didn't complete our mission. We crashed one right there on the home base.

G: Taking off you mean?

T: On take off, yes, we flew through trees, we hit trees on takeoff and it was late at night and did quite a bit of damage to the hydraulic system and we came back, we went out over and dropped our four bomb bay tanks. We had four five-hundred gallon tanks in the bomb bays and we dropped those and burned off some of the wing fuel, dropped the toe-heel tanks and we came back in and landed. It ran off and over there they have these irrigation ditches paralleling the runways and then at the end they have these large drainage ditches and we came in and landed and applied the brakes and of course the aircraft veered off the runway and the right main gear jumped the little ditch. But the nose gear went into the ditch and paralleled it and we went down to the end and hit down at the end and thank God it didn't burn. They had to cut me out with hacksaw blades and carted me off to the little town of Dacca, to the hospital and then transferred me later on to General Hospital in Calcutta and this happened on December 6, 1944. I came home in 1945. So it just tied up about a year, all total, before I got back on active duty and then I elected to separate and now serve as a state reserve.

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G: Let me ask you about security on *Air Force One*. Were you responsible for security on the aircraft as well as its performance and its provisions?

T: Not as such. Not directly because we had our own military police, our own guard. I was the OIC [officer in charge] of the presidential air crew, Cross was the military aid at the White House. I stayed at Andrews and I had an office of [inaudible] office. I was the OIC so I was responsible for the whole crew, which included the guards and the in-flight kitchen and the cooks, and the stewards. The cooks we had, some of them didn't go aboard, they weren't flight personnel, but we had cooks assigned and had our own in-flight kitchen. But security wise we had our own security police and we had one, Sergeant McCreedy was the head of that security force and we had—they were assigned flight duty, drew flight-pay same as we did, but they were responsible for it at each base. Of course they cooperated with the person at base personnel wherever we were flying and they were responsible for it. The secret service of course they took care of the President and his party, Vice President, rest of them.

G: You were responsible for the crew so I presume if there were personnel problems that was your bailiwick.

T: That was my responsibility.

G: Now it's fairly well known that Mr. Johnson was not always easy to work for.

T: That's true.

G: Were there problems reflected in the crew, morale or so on, because of this? Did anyone ever try to get out or try to get in?

T: You mean of the crew members?

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G: Yes.

T: No, no one wanted out, no. We had a lot of people that wanted to be assigned to the crew, but we didn't have any that wanted to get out. We got rid of some because of one thing or another and of course that was my responsibility to do that.

G: Did you get rid of them as a result of LBJ's suggestion or something, that they weren't up to snuff in their performance of duty, or something of that sort?

T: It wasn't that they weren't up to par on their duties, it's just--one case in particular was messing around with another guy's wife and in this instance he took the guy's wife aboard the airplane, she sat in the President's chair. She ended up with little goodies that we passed out on the airplane that had the President's seal on it and [the] President's name on it. Word got out and got to the husband who was overseas and the next thing you know all hell broke loose and of course--I can't remember the guy's name at that time, but anyway, I won't mention any names. But the President got into it and of course he says to so and so, he says, "You take care of it." Well, that guy, he picks up the phone and calls Cross, Cross calls me.

G: And the President got word of this?

T: Oh, you bet. Absolutely. So we had to get rid of him, you had those wheelers and dealers.

G: He was using his status to impress somebody?

T: Yes. Sure, has to be. Yet the guy was a top-notch man, individual, and as far as performing his duties, so it had nothing to do with his job, it's just that he made a mistake. He said, "Well, I didn't think it would go this far." Well, at the time you were

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messing around with somebody else you don't think it's going to go that far until it's too late. And you realize then you've made a mistake. So we had--I had no choice. I had to get rid of him.

Of course, see, I had several bosses at that time. Cross was the aid but he was also considered the President's pilot so I'm catching hell from him and I'm catching hell from my wing commander. I have to be loyal to him too, you know. I had to go to my wing commander and tell him what the story was and said, "We can't have him on the crew, we can't have him on the base, we can't have him because the base--anything involving flight on the base was supporting the President's crew or presidential mission." So we couldn't have him anywhere near where he would be apt to fly even with another squadron, but in support of the President, security wise, they just wouldn't consider. So we had to get rid of him.

Fortunately the man had enough time--instead of going out they were going to railroad him over some foreign country. And I'm feeling bad because I like the guy, but I had to do it. I had to go to wing commander and say, "Okay, get him another assignment off the base." So they looked around and in just a matter of minutes. It's surprising. It might take months, everybody says, "Oh, I can't do it. They can't transfer, can't do this, can't do that, because of paperwork." But in a case like that all it takes is a phone call and a matter of about three minutes you have an assignment for a guy over at the end of the world. That's what happened and so the guy was--fortunately he had time to retire and he said, "To heck with it. I'll choose to retire." So he retired right there at Bergstrom and they kept him right there.

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G: At Bergstrom?

T: Not at Bergstrom, at Andrews. They kept him right there so they assigned him to the border pool where he had nothing to do and put him in charge of something down there, some oddball thing until he could retire which was really a downgrade and really went against the grain, but what else can you do? The guy messed up.

G: How--you mentioned that you were in charge of provisioning the aircraft, too?

T: There again, the stewards and the cooks. The stewards would prepare the menu and they'd always type out a menu for every meal and then the stewards and the cooks went out and purchased this food. They had special places where they went and they had to have it inspected, checked, and then it was prepared in our in-flight kitchen and put aboard the aircraft. Now, when you come down--of course that's at home base. You come down here they use catering. All the bases have an in-flight kitchen and it works through there.

G: Did Mr. Johnson have preferences what he wanted stocked on the aircraft?

T: It varied. It varied. When we were flying the Jet Star when he was vice president we had limited space. Very small cabin and very small galley and it was a sort of a short order type thing like chili. He liked chili and he liked--we had a guy by the name of Ritz who was a steward.

G: How do you spell it?

T: R-I-T-Z, Frank Ritz. Just like Ritz crackers and the Vice President liked Ritz's chili so we'd have chili, cheese, crackers, we might have roast beef or sliced roast beef or

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something like that for the other people. But most of the time on a short flight like that we didn't serve too many meals, really, or they didn't.

G: What about on the longer trips where you might be in-flight for a meal, maybe two meals?

T: You didn't run across that on the Jet Star when he was vice president. Now on the big airplane you might but they could handle that. My gosh, that airplane had all sorts of cooking utensils on it, ovens, microwaves and everything.

G: He had a preference for root beer I understand. Is that right? Do you remember that?

T: No, I don't.

G: Well, maybe I've got the story wrong. In any case it--maybe it changed. I know at one point diet drinks were a big thing. There was a diet orange, I think.

T: Dr. Pepper, he had a thing for Dr. Pepper at one time. He may have changed, but I remember he did have a thing going for Dr. Pepper.

G: Did--in connection with security, were there drills? Did anybody try to penetrate security to see if you were tight or not?

T: Yes. Occasionally. Throughout the air force this happens and they check your security and they might write in--if they do get aboard they'd write across in your Form 1, which is our aircraft log, "This airplane has been pencil bombed," which indicates that sure enough it could happen. But I don't recall because at our home base the whole wing there was under security. All the pilots were cleared for top secret and most of the radio operators; the navigators were not. Some of the flight personnel, most of them were, but even the engineers were not. They were cleared maybe for secret, but not for top secret

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and they had a radar-type security thing around our whole area and we had roving patrols and roving police. But the aircraft, speaking about the air plane, it stayed in the hangar all the time. It was fueled and we had our own personal shaving kits aboard, some clothing, so we were ready to go all the time and each of the pilots and the navigator carried a bell boy and which--

G: A beeper?

T: Beeper, yes. We called them a bellboy back in those days. We were on alert all the time so we were ready to go, but security wise--down here then or--I say down here at Bergstrom or Randolph. Wherever you go our security man, Sergeant McCreedy would arrange for security and he'd arrange through the base and get other guards so that our flight personnel weren't standing out there for twelve or fourteen or fifteen or twenty-four hour shift. You might be sent in one place for two days so the airplanes got to be under guard so they had it and they had their lights and their little radar things set up. So it was a good system and I assume it's the same today.

G: Were you ever penetrated? Did they ever write in your Form 1?

T: No, I don't recall ever.

G: What would you do when you flew into the Ranch for security?

T: We had our guards.

G: And then they had it to do on their own?

T: You bet. We didn't park it in his hangar. Wouldn't fit in his hangar for one thing but we parked right near the hangar. Right up by the hangar.

G: And you might be there four, five, six days.

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T: Oh, we've stayed out there maybe for a week or so, ten days.

G: Did you stay at the Ranch on this occasion?

T: Uh-huh.

G: Where did they billet you out there?

T: Well this is a funny story. When he was vice president he didn't have too many security or secret service assigned to him, I think maybe four or six. But I can recall three or four of them and we would stay, Jim and I would stay at Bergstrom, and then when we got Sergeant Pepe, we call him Peppy our flight engineer, we'd still stay at Bergstrom and we'd stay in the VIP quarters at Bergstrom, all three of us together and that's before we started staying out there. This is as vice president. We never stayed out there when he was vice president that I recall. We stayed here at Bergstrom and if he wanted to go somewhere then, then we'd fly the airplane from Bergstrom to the Ranch, pick him and go where he wanted to go and come back and drop him, come back to Bergstrom. Well, when he was--his first election, 1964, when he was elected, it was during that election that was late--my gosh, it was early in the morning as a matter of fact. He had been here at Austin watching the results and wanted to go out to the Ranch. We flew him out there and I believe this is the same time. Anyway right at that same time there, time frame. Usually he would come up and stand right between us and he'd put his arms up there, one like this you know.

G: One on either chair?

T: Yes. And he'd talk to us. Well, we came out there, took him out there that night or that morning and he said, came up there and stopped, and he said "Well now what are you

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going to do?" So Cross looked at me, blank, and I looked at him and Cross said, "Well, Mr. President, I guess we'll go back to Bergstrom like we always do," and he said, "Well how am I going to get out of here if they drop the bomb?" Our mouths just dropped open, you know. So Cross finally got his wits about him, he said, "Well, how about we just go down there and stay in the guest house?" Fine. So we stayed in the guest house. We stayed there about two weeks and we got kicked out of there. (Laughter) That was long enough. Using Mrs. Johnson's towels and sheets and of course eating in there in the guest house, but we had to sign roster, you know, we had to pay for our meals, and we paid him so much a night for staying in the guest house.

They took us down to this old Jordan place, which is a neighboring ranch and Johnson had a lease on it and it was just a big old ranch house about ten foot high ceiling and in each room it had a light cord coming down about six [or] eight feet long with a bulb on the end of it. He had one wooden table in there and a couple of wooden chairs and a fireplace. [It had only] one bathroom and things weren't too good. So we swept it out, cleaned it out, and we called John Bradley who was Major at the time, made Lieutenant Colonel. He was protocol officer here at Bergstrom and through him we got from supply GI bunks, sheets, pillows and blankets, had them hauled out there, and that's what we slept on. We stayed there and cooked our own meals or we'd go into Stonewall. We finally got us a car, or Cross did, and had our little radio that you'd clip on to the thing where he'd contact us, and that's how we lived. We had two stewards at the time. They added another. I had Paul Glenn and they added another, Ken Gaddis, two stewards. We had the two navy medics, Tom Mills and I don't recall the other man's

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name, Stew something and there were three of us. They had a couple of--there were seven all total. Three, four, five, six, seven of us.

And one night around Christmastime, I don't know which year. It must have been the same year, though, because a car drove up and we're sitting in there and some of us in our shorts playing poker, had a fire going in the fireplace and a car drove up, blew the horn. Peppy went to the door in his shorts and hell there's Marie Fehmer, Mrs. Johnson, the President, and some--Earl Deathe--I don't know if those names ring a bell. Weeze Deathe was his wife's name at the time. They came in, old Johnson's got that flashlight and he's shining that flashlight all around in all these rooms and he said, "You mean to tell me that all you guys are staying down here and you've only got one bathroom?" Yes sir. "No furniture, no nothing, no TV, no nothing?" Yes sir. And boy he turned to Earl Deathe and he says, "Earl, you take care of them. I want this fixed up." They came in and they spent a lot of money fixing that old place up, put in a colored TV, another bathroom, some beds, and then they started charging us four dollars and fifty cents a night to sleep there.

(Laughter)

We paid that to a secret--not a secret fund but we paid that to a woman by the name of Mildred Stegall. They had a special fund and why they did it that way--but anyway, we paid it to her.

G: Did your meal money go into the same fund?

T: At that time we were on our own for meals. You didn't eat down at the guesthouse. No, we were on our own.

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G: You ate at the--what's the name of that? Is that the Casparis cafe in Stonewall?

T: It was the Stonewall Motel and Restaurant, [the] Honneys, Kermit and Tillie Honney, owned and operated that for years and they were good people. They took us in and every Thanksgiving and every Christmas they'd close the restaurant and it was open just to all the secret service and all the Ranch people, flight crews and all the Ranch people.

G: Still quite a number of people.

T: By this time now we're staying then. We're taking rooms after--this is after he became president then. We moved uptown. We went down to Stonewall and moved into the motels. They fixed up the--as a matter of fact they fixed up that Jordan ranch for one of the security guards. They had fenced all the way around the Ranch and these security posts, cattle guard and security posts and these guards who were civilians, but they--one of those families moved into the Jordan house. So we moved into the Stonewall Motel. And we got the same rooms every trip. Who was it? UPI [United Press International], Ferd Kaufman was with UPI and he had two rooms because he had an awful lot of equipment and I'll never forget him, but he always kept his eye on us out there at the Ranch because [in] getting information that way. He'd see us scurrying around [and] he knew something was up.

G: Did they ever try to pump you that way, find out where you were going next and so on?

T: Yes, all the time. Always sitting out there at the end of the runway with his cameras. We'd taken off or landing.

G: How was that runway out at the Ranch from a pilot's point of view for taking off and landing?

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T: It wasn't the greatest. When we first started flying in there he had fifty-two hundred feet and fairly narrow and I don't know if you're familiar with it or not, you've got [Highway] 290 and telephone lines and electrical lines and you've got some Ranch land in between and there's a road, the Ranch Road 1 and more trees and more wires and then the river and then a little bit of land and then the runway. You had trees all around and if you land to the north, this end was considerably lower than the other end. Down at this end you could not see the other end of the runway until you went about four thousand feet and you hit the top and then it leveled out for the remaining about eleven hundred feet, something like that. So we would always land to the north unless we'd had a strong south wind. If we had a good strong south wind, then we'd land into the wind, land south.

G: Well in this part of the country you often do have that southeast wind don't you?

T: Yes. Prevailing sort of like southeast to northwest and *vice versa*, but this was--it's been so long I don't even remember the runway number. Seems to me like it was thirty-five, in other words about 350, which would be almost southeast [inaudible] northwest. Anyway, we would nearly always land to the north and he didn't want us to turn around on the runway. He wanted us to go to the end because it would--if you happened to run off you might get stuck for one thing. It was fairly narrow. It was only about sixty feet wide and he did have runway lights, but there was a bad spot up as you leveled off towards the north end there's a bad spot; water'd come down there. You know how it deteriorates your road here after a frost or freeze, chuckholes do the same thing, so it was a maintenance problem and of course most of the time he had Melvin Winters coming from Johnson City to come in and do the paving on it and rebuilding it. So after he became

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President, then, we griped and complained about it because we wanted trees cut down, we wanted more runway and he did. One day he got Jim and I in the car, says, "Come on. You guys have been griping about this runway, come on. He took us and there was a fourth man, I don't remember--

G: It wasn't Dale Malechek was it?

T: No. I think it might have been Melvin Winters, but it was someone that was going to do some work on it. But anyway, [he] said, "Okay, what do you want done?" He had a fence, steel fence post and--I think it was barbed wire instead of fence, but right off just the end of the runway at the south end so he could graze right up to that. We wanted that fence moved back and sure enough one of our airplanes did come in and landed short and drove one of those steel posts right up to the tail of the airplane. This is when he decided let's do something about it.

G: Who was flying then? Were you flying then?

T: No. Another guy by the name of Drumond, one of our wing pilots. It wasn't our airplane--well it was our airplane, a little Jet Star, but it was another Jet Star.

G: Was Mr. Johnson aboard when that happened?

T: Oh, no. No. But he was there at the Ranch. Anyway, Jim told him what he wanted, said, "Well, Mr. President I'd like to have this fence taken down and moved back, I'd like to have these trees cut down, there's trees to the north end. It's a mental problem coming in. You always get a swirling--especially at the north end landing south--get a whirlwinds we call them, and do strange things to that airplane when you're decelerating. He added at the north end, he added eleven hundred feet, made it 6300 feet long with a turnaround

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at each end so you didn't turn around in the middle, or if you could land and slam on the brakes and reverse and stop, you still taxi to the end to turn around. You don't ever want to get caught turning around in the middle of the runway because he would really chew somebody out.

Of course they'd build up for security then, they had the couple of travel trailers or not travel but mobile homes up at the other end for the army, for the helicopter pilots and their crew. And they had security--secret service had their own little house, it was one of the Johnson houses there. It was small, a small house, a frame house, and they took that over. Cross had--the aides trailer was a trailer, mobile home, and if Cross--Cross and I would stay out there. We rotated. We had three pilots, Don Short and myself and Cross and Don--of course we all three were dual qualified in the 707 and the Jet Star and we're all three instructor pilots in them. So one trip I would fly down with Cross on the big airplane and Don Short would bring the Jet Star and--

T: If we were coming into Bergstrom he'd be here at Bergstrom refueled with a clearance made out to go to the Ranch and then he would go out with Cross and stay out there that trip. Next trip I would--Don and I would alternate. And then of course if Cross was gone for some reason, which happened occasionally. His father died one time and so I was the aircraft commander then and stayed out there and if Cross wanted off from out there then I was, so to speak, the aide out there and it worked out. It was a pretty good system. It was hectic, kept you on the stick all the time.

G: I've noticed a lot of times in the aircraft logs sometimes you'd land at Bergstrom, sometimes you'd land at Randolph. Was there any particular reason for that?

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T: Just whatever they wanted. And this came from the White House. I assume the President made that decision.

G: It wasn't a pilot's decision or anything of that sort?

T: No, that came from the White House and it wasn't our decision at all as pilot. I got my information from the aide, from Cross, see.

G: And then you would file a flight plan?

T: That's right. Yes. In other words when we get wind of a--and tell you what, it was pretty hectic trying to keep ahead of this thing because Johnson was fairly secretive. He didn't want people to know where he was going or when, even Mrs. Johnson.

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G: --secretive even when Mrs. Johnson was going someplace.

T: That's true.

G: Did he ever say anything to you about that, why, or warn you about telling anybody where the next trip was.

T: There'd be certain trips he'd want to take someone with him. But he didn't want other people, especially outsiders, to know who it was. That's what I meant a while ago when I said it's hard to hide a 707. Several times when we were down at Randolph and we'd get the word, "Hide the airplane." Well where do you hide it? We had a certain routine in the morning getting ready to go. The engineer or myself would take the airplane down to the end of the runway and we'd taxi it around and reposition it from where it was held security-wise and reposition it up in front of the tower because that's where he wanted to depart from. Well oftentimes he wanted to depart from the other end of the field because

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he'd had automobiles coming out with people or maybe the helicopter but several occasions which didn't make sense to me, of course, I didn't understand all the things anyway but--I thought I did at the time. But it seems silly to me to take an airplane and move it down to the other end of the runway and then have these guys come up there in their automobiles and everybody gets out and stand there on the steps and waving at the crowd. Didn't make sense to me, see. This is the guy he's trying to keep secretive. Anyway, that's the way it was and--

G: You're smiling as though you remembered something in particular.

T: (Laughter) No, just that, I guess.

G: What about overseas trips? The one that occurs to me was the trip to Scandinavia. Did you go with the Vice President when he went to Scandinavia?

T: As vice president, no. No. Like I said before, that would have been by the other squadron and matter of fact I think Al Bertasi was in our wing at that time. He made one trip with him that I know of on the 707, not the 26000 but one of the--they had three what they called B models which was a 707 also, but it wasn't [a] presidential airplane. But Al Bertasi did fly him on when he was vice president.

G: How would you describe LBJ as a passenger? Obviously he had free reign to tell you anything that he liked or didn't like. Was he a good flyer?

T: I can only speak of my own experience. You hear a lot of stories, you know, and a lot of people it's hearsay, but from my own experiences yes he would come up--he'd come up to the cockpit frequently and sit. We had [inaudible] you've got the pilot seat and you had the console and the co-pilots seat and on this side you've got the engineer and over here's

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a navigator and right behind, you know, navigator's back here but right behind is a sort of a command seat, right behind the pilot, left side. He would sit up there and chat with us. He wouldn't spend too much time but come up and look around. He was knowledgeable on weather and things. He would get his briefings before and check the weathers and then he'd test us like, "Well, what's the weather going to be like in New York?" or where we're going. Of course, you'd better be right.

G: He knew the answer before he asked you.

T: But he would [inaudible] and occasionally he would get off and especially on the Jet Star he would nearly always come up and he'd just raise hand on my shoulder. This was after I became the aircraft commander. A lot of times he'd stick his hand up here and shake it. Nice firm grip, big hand, and a lot of times he'd say, "Thank you, good landing," or he'd just put his hand on the shoulder, "See you later," something like that.

G: Did he ever complain about a landing?

T: No, he never complained about a landing, no. One time he complimented me. In fact, the first trip that I made as aircraft commander in May I took over the crew in May. Cross was nominated by him to be the wing commander down here at Bergstrom and nominated to be a brigadier general. Cross wrote him a letter, this was in May, and told him that he was going to have to start wrapping up his own personal affairs and getting ready to transfer and all that. And he wrote a letter to the President recommending that I stay on as the aircraft commander and that Short stay on as the other pilot because we knew his--I'd been with him for six years at that time and he said, "They know your needs and fully qualified and all that jazz and keep on." So I received a copy of that

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memo through Cross with his approval on it. And my first trip then as aircraft commander was in the 707 down to--up here at Carswell, Fort Worth. It was a long runway. As I recall it's about eleven or twelve hundred feet long and I just literally flew the airplane on the runway and you couldn't even tell we were down. The only way you can tell you're down is you can hear the [inaudible] clicking and that night Marie Fehmer who was his personal secretary called and she said, "Paul, [the] President commented about that landing, said that's the best landing he ever [had] in a 707." And I said, "Well, I appreciate that" and I said, "Marie, I think I screwed up." She said, "Paul, the President's on the phone listening." She says, "What do you mean?" and I said, "Well, I set a precedent." I said, "This is my first landing with him as aircraft commander." I'd landed with him before but just as AC and I said--or as his pilot. I said, "I set a precedent. Now he'll expect this all the time." But no, he never did complain about a bad landing. There were several other little stories that you can always tell.

G: Go right ahead.

T: I remember--let's see, this has nothing to do with a landing. I tell you what, go back out there to the Ranch before he extended that runway. We had told him--he asked us one time why we always landed uphill. So Jim told him, if we land to the south and you lose the brake system, we might just end up down there in that river. And he remembered that and when we were getting ready--when he took us out there for that ride he said, "Well, I remember you told me one time about dumping me in the river. What do you want?" That's when he extended the runway.

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I can't--we didn't make too many bad landings and if we did make one that was not maybe up to our standard or our perfections it was because maybe there's a tremendous amount of crosswind or something like that, or bad weather, and I remember when we--we took him--let's see. We left from Dulles, Cross and I in [a] 26000. I think that's the one we took him on that Rome trip. We left from Dulles and we were really full with fuel and people and baggage. We were grossed out. And the President watched the take off on TV. Sitting back there in his little compartment in his chair and he came up later and he said he was a little concerned about takeoff because there was a lot of roll, we used every foot of that runway. Cross was the pilot and he was doing the talking; I'm sitting there taking care of the clearances and flying the airplane, actually, from the right seat. And we made it all right and climbed out of there.

But then coming back on that same trip then, coming back in we hit bad weather. I'm telling you. Cross and I were really concerned. We've never--I personally have never been in that much of or that severe [of a] weather storm. There's just no way to get around it. You couldn't climb over it, you couldn't get around it. We got her back in. One night when we came in, it was about the same way, we landed at Washington National, which is fairly short runways, we made her in there too. Of course, we both had--well, all three of us--we had our ATR rating for the 707 and we were qualified to go right down to zero zero if need be, which we were limited as I recall to a hundred and a half or something like that, half mile, this would be a hundred feet height. But we have both flown the airplane down to zero zero so we went--good airplane, good equipment, we knew what our capabilities were and he respected that.

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Matter of fact out one trip, this was after I was AC [aircraft commander] I had a short flight from Andrews to LaGuardia and of course LaGuardia has at that time I think was either a seven or eight hundred foot minimum with two miles because it's not the best airport to get into; they didn't have the ILS [instrument landing system] and all that set up like they do over at Idlewild at that time; it's now JFK.

But anyway, we took off from Andrews, and it was night and we were supposed to go into this LaGuardia and we transferred over. You just get airborne and you get out of Washington there's air district or area into New York Center. New York came right back and said, "Are you aware that it's down to something like 201, something like that?" Gosh, no, really it threw us for a loop because we weren't briefed on that at all. It wasn't supposed to be that way, and he said, "Well, it is. We'll continue on and can we get into Kennedy?" I said yes, I thought we could, so I had to call the aide up and there was Hugh Robinson and I said, "Get to the President right away and tell him that we cannot go into LaGuardia." That means all that security and everything has to--and secret service and all those cars and everything had to be moved over there to Idlewild real quick.

So the President came up and he said, "What's the situation?" I told him and he said, "Can you get in there? Can you get me in there?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes, sir. We can get you in there and get you out. They say the weather's going to hold right at the minimum so we cannot go to the other one." He said, "Well, it's not that all fired important. If you can't get me in there safely you just turn this thing around and take me back to Washington." I said, "Sir, we'll get you in there." It

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told me that he had confidence in my abilities as a pilot and we got him in there and got him out. But it just meant we had to change all of the people from one airport to the other. But everybody has to be flexible.

G: Especially when you're flying for the President.

T: You bet.

G: Do you recall him ever commenting on the quality of the service or the kind of food he got or any of that sort of thing?

T: No, not to me personally he didn't. If he had any comments he would tell maybe perhaps Paul Glenn who was [you] might say his valet. He was with him all the time, he laid out his clothing and did all that sort of thing for him.

G: There's a story that's told and I haven't been able to confirm it, that he chewed out one of the stewards because he didn't have whatever brand of soft drink he was currently drinking and when he got finished and the plane landed the steward went right straight to wherever you went to in circumstances like that and said, "I want out. I want a transfer." Does that ring any bells at all?

T: No, it doesn't. Like I said before, you hear a lot of stories and a lot of rumors, but there are so many things happening all the time in a situation like that I wasn't aware of it, no.

G: What about the longer trips? How do you avoid fatigue when you're going to make the Rome trip, for example, or did you go with him on his surprise trip to Vietnam?

T: Yes. We carried three pilots, what you call an augmented crew. MAC [Military Airlift Command] and *Air Force Two*, they're full of regulations. Well, military airlift command has regulations too. I may have forgotten some of the figures, but anyway we had what

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we called a basic crew which would be two pilots, one navigator, one flight engineer and that makes up a crew and like I say on the transport even--and we were bound these same rules and regs and you could go for a true duty time of eighteen hours. Now, if you add another pilot and another navigator and another flight engineer to relieve, in other words you could rotate them so that you're not on duty all the time, then you could go for twenty-seven hours. So during that time then that extra pilot is supposedly back in a bunk sleeping and a flight engineer and the other navigator, resting.

G: Were they?

T: In some cases. 'Course on the 707 we didn't have the bunks but you go back and sit in the seat, sleep in the seat, it's not all that great. I mean, it's not like laying down in bed, taking your clothes off and sleeping. Some of them we did, we had bunks, and I don't recall exceeding that twenty-seven hours. We took him around when we went to Cam Ranh Bay, went to Vietnam, but we took him over there a couple of times. They had that summit out in the Philippines. I think that was one trip we went from there, to him into Vietnam, Cam Ranh Bay as I recall.

G: Do you recall the incident with the metals on the way to Cam Ranh Bay?

T: Vaguely.

G: Someone came up to the cabin and told I guess it was then Colonel Cross, "By the way, have you got all those metals?" Do you recall something of that?

T: I don't know if I was on that trip or not with him. If I wasn't on that one I was on the backup airplane. There again, like I said before, we alternated, rotated, and matter of fact when he went to Rome that time I was on the backup, I was commander of that airplane.

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Yes, I heard that story too. I wasn't on that airplane when he did that but there was something about the flap about the metals, having the right number, the right ones.

G: Did you file the flight plans on that trip?

T: For my particular airplane. The pilot other--Short was on with Cross, so Short filed the flight plans for the other one, but see we didn't know--my God, we didn't know--the time we landed to takeoff--we didn't [know] where we were going to go. They kept changing things on us and it was pretty hectic. On that particular trip I was flying the backup airplane and we had--I had two other pilots with me from the wing. I was augmented; we were all augmented. But the B model is a shorter airplane, doesn't carry as much fuel and the brake system is entirely different so you were restricted in certain ways. Speedwise it's just about the same, but the other one maybe just a skoshi bit faster and it was always a difficult chore for the backup crew to take off after the President. The President comes out and he gets on board the airplane and whoever the secret service are with him they jump on board and they take off and he might--maybe he invited maybe five or ten we call them newsies. Well they're out there grinding away taking pictures, but they hurry and scurry and get on board through the back door; if he goes through the front door they go through the back or *vice versa*. Anyway, they get aboard.

Now in the meantime we have security also and we have other personnel and some newsies and what have you that has to get aboard that B model. We take off last and we have to land first so that they get out there and get in position and that's a difficult chore. On this trip it was difficult, and I recall on the one leg you don't fly over the airspace of Cambodia and other countries over there and Cross didn't help me out on that

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leg at all. We had--I don't remember who the press ship, which one, but we couldn't--just flying the thing to the wall, throttles to the wall, and you have a mach warning bell. When you reach your mach number, which you're red-lined to which is somewhere around 0.088 or 0.089 or something like that which is subsonic, which is less than one mach or the speed of sound by that much. The bell would come off and ring and it's a loud bell so you'd pull the circuit breaker on it and you exceeded everything and you're just going as fast as you can possibly go, but you can't catch up because they're doing the same thing.

So I'm screaming at this TWA pilot to change altitudes with me. He's at a lower altitude. Because I've got to get in there first and land. Well, Cross came back and said, "No, negative, let old Thornhill earn his pay." Well, that didn't set too well with me or the other two pilots I had so I had one choice. That's cancel my IFR [International Flight Rules] clearance and go VFR [Visual Flight Rules] and go direct instead of going into the flight plan to these different points, I'm going to cut across. Well we skipped across certain points there. We may not supposed to have, but anyway, we got in there and landed ahead of him but we weren't very happy about it. We just barely touched the ground when they were right on our tail. It's hectic. Well, now that's been changed; they're using 26000 now as a backup. They've got till 27000 as a primary airplane and they're both identical.

G: How hard is it when you don't have much notice to find out where you can land and where you can fuel and what route you can take?

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T: That makes it difficult. You start making a lot of telephone calls or radio calls and of course all your fuel is supposed to be--the fuel trucks were under security too. They take samples of it and then they put a padlock on it or seal until we use it. It's a lot of fun I tell you.

G: Did you ever fly Sam Houston Johnson?

T: I did. I didn't even know who Sam Houston was. I thought that was just a fictitious name. We flew him from Andrews down here on the Jet Star and there again I don't recall who the--we call them escort officers. I don't remember who he was, but anyway Sam, they brought him out there and they put him in that VIP chair and slid it all the way back and they rigged up another--I don't know if he had a broken leg at that time or a bad leg--something wrong with his legs I know, so they had him all propped up out there on that airplane and all we had on the passenger list or manifest was Sam Houston. What the heck kind of joke is this. I didn't realize that was just his actual name. I found out later. But we flew him down here.

G: When you say here, you mean to Austin?

T: Flew down to Austin, here at Bergstrom, yes. From Washington to here. That's the only time I flew him.

G: Did you talk to him at that time?

T: As I recall just polite, just went back and told him I was a pilot and introduced myself and that's about it. We were ordered by the individual board not to have any alcoholic beverages of any kind and they requested all this certain food for the meal but no drinks of any kind.

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G: How about Adenauer's funeral. Did you fly to that in Germany?

T: Yes.

G: He sent a plane to the Ranch to pick somebody up as I recall. Were you on that plane or did you fly with the President then or what?

T: I went with Cross on the big airplane. We went in--as I recall we flew into Bonn.

G: Did you have the priest on board? The priest out there at Stonewall?

T: Yes. Father Schneider. Big heavy set fellow. He went back to Germany.

G: I heard that. He retired and still got relatives there, I think. Wunibald Schneider.

T: Yes, Don Short and I both were on that trip with Cross.

G: Was that a memorable trip for any reason?

T: No, other than just flying into Bonn. I had an eight millimeter movie camera and a lot of these places like that I would sit up in the cockpit and take pictures out the window for the ground ceremonies, but now that eight millimeter is obsolete. In fact I have two rolls of film in here that's been lying there for about five years. I've never had them developed and I don't know if they'd be any good or not. I should send them in I suppose.

G: Well we've got an audiovisual department there at the Library.

T: The eight millimeter is wider they tell me.

G: Super eight, I think.

T: Super eight, yes.

G: Well, there may be some technical way of converting it.

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- T: I suppose if I just check into it. Anyway, back to your question, I suppose if we stop and think about each trip there would be one thing that would be memorable but I didn't write anything or keep notes. I wish I had. I really wish I had now, but it's too late to go back.
- G: Now you mentioned some of the touchy things about flying over certain countries or to certain countries. There's a story about some extraordinary security that was put on when the President flew to Florida on one trip. Were you--
- T: I wasn't on that mission, no, but I recall the incident and they sent out I think three airplanes and supposedly no one's supposed to know which one of them the President was on. There was some rumor I guess that some pilots were going to ram the airplane in flight.
- G: Some Cuban pilots.
- T: Yes. So they took some extra measures there. I don't know whether we had--I'm sure that we did, probably, thinking about it now, they probably had some escort aircraft, I would just assume. I know that when we went, from [the] Philippines on into Vietnam, fighters came out and intercepted us and escorted us into Vietnam. So I'm sure the same thing happened on that trip.
- G: What about--there was another trip to Florida, I think after Hurricane Dora in September. Were you on that one that you recall? President wanted to go down and see the damage for himself.
- T: I really don't know. I was on several of those flood trips. One was here in Southern Texas and I don't remember what year it was. I know that the whole southern part of the

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state was mostly underwater. Down around Harlingen, all through there. On this other one, I think I was on it, but I can't be certain.

G: I just had a quote here from Frank Kormire. He said there was a memorable part of the trip where they flew very low altitude and some of the press men were a little alarmed at that. I thought that might bring back a recollection.

T: No. I might not have been on that one then.

G: Did you fly him during the 1964 campaign on his campaigning trips?

T: Yes.

G: What kind of a year was that for you?

T: A hectic trip. We made a number of flights, campaign trips, and several stops in a day.

G: Did you always know where you were going ahead of time?

T: Yes.

G: There's another story, and I don't mean to keep making you confirm or deny but on a trip to Kansas where Kormire said he was sitting for some reason in the observer's chair and there was some disagreement between the pilot and the copilot over which airport they were supposed to put down at because there were two of them in sight.

T: No I don't recall that.

G: You may not have been on that one. Anyway, the copilot won the argument. I thought, well, he would remember that.

T: No, I don't recall that. No, I don't know who that would have been. That would be bad if you landed at the wrong airport, wouldn't it? (Laughter)

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G: Well, he said he was a little concerned because the pilot said, "Well we're putting down here," and the copilot was saying, "No, no. It's over there."

(Laughter)

Do you recall any equipment malfunctions or extremely severe weather other than the weather you've talked about coming back to Dulles that time that caused you to have some anxiety about the safety of the aircraft?

T: No. Let's see. Well, there were two, two times. One on a Jet Star and one on [a] 26000, a big airplane, but it wasn't anything dangerous. One we had just taken off on--I don't recall where this happened or when--but one of the fire warning lights came on and of course when that comes on the bell starts ringing, too, and I'm talking--I'm sitting in the right seat and Cross is flying the airplane--and I'm talking to the operators when this thing came on and it just so surprised us that before either one of us could reach up there and pull the handle Don Short was standing--it was in the jump seat. He just reached up there and pulled the handle and of course that silenced the bell and that cuts off--the engine cuts off the fuel and hydraulic fluid and oil and everything else goes to that particular engine. But we still had three and it didn't pose any problem at all.

G: Was it a faulty warning or a real--?

T: Yes. It certainly was. And one time on the Jet Star we're crossing over, coming back somewhere out west. I don't remember if it was California or where it was, but it was a fairly long leg and we had difficulty with the primary hydraulic system, but we had the backup so we elected to go ahead and proceed on which we did and we landed without any problems at all. But those are the only two times that I could recall. You'd have

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minor problems, but you always had time, it seemed like, to get it corrected before
takeoff.

G: Did you see the one story--I think I sent it along in here--about one of the aircraft. I think
it was the main aircraft that had hydraulic problems going into Guam, but LBJ had
already switched to the backup plane for some reason or the press plane I suppose it was.
Does that ring any bells at all?

T: No, I went in--when we went to Guam I was on the backup airplane. I don't recall that,
no.

G: As I recall there was some concern about the brakes, that they were going to have to
apply a mechanical braking system rather than the hydraulic and they were worried about
it being rough. I'm not an aircraft man so I may be talking nonsense, but I recall that
story. But you don't remember that one?

T: No. I sure don't.

G: You flew the President back, then, on his final trip back from--?

T: You mean when he went out of office?

G: Yes.

T: Yes, I did.

G: What do you remember of that one?

T: Well, I remember that it was fairly late at night as I recall and I don't recall who was with
me on the crew. I know Short had the little airplane down here and we took him out to
the Ranch, then, in the little airplane. There were gobs of people on board both airplanes
and when we did land out at the Ranch then all of Johnson City was out there and he had

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a big thing going out there. A lot of people from Fredericksburg and towns all around came out there. I never saw so many people in all of my life, but he didn't come up and say anything to either one of us. We didn't get to see him after that to say goodbye or anything and we hung around out there for a little while and finally got clearance from--Haywood Smith was the military aid at that time. Marine Lieutenant Colonel and he finally told us go ahead and take the airplane back and we went back to Bergstrom and I flew the big airplane back to Andrews and Short flew the little one back to Andrews. But they had a hangar full of people out there. They had some speeches going on.

G: Kind of anticlimactic for you, then.

T: Uh-huh.

G: Let me ask you about these persistent stories about secret flights to Mexico. Could you shed any light on that aspect of it?

T: No, I can't. I didn't make any of them. Don Short made one or two.

G: In the Convair?

T: Short made one in the Jet Star and that's after he retired I assume.

G: No, during the time that he was in office.

T: No, I don't know. I didn't make any of them. I don't know anything about those.

G: Do you know that they took place for sure or not?

T: Some did but I don't know where to or the nature of them, the purpose or anything like that. You just hear that he went to Mexico but--and of course they probably wanted it kept quiet.

G: There was a Convair maintained out at the Ranch, wasn't there?

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T: Yes. After he retired as president we had a Convair 580, turbo prop. It came down, was sent down here from Washington, DC, had two pilots on it, Captain Aho and Captain Eberhardt.

G: How do you spell that first one, do you know?

T: A-H-O. Aho. And they were the two pilots on that and I was supposed to--in fact I did--I transferred down here and I was ultimately supposed to become qualified in the Convair 580 and also the T-39. We had a T-39 out here and it had a helicopter. So that's the reason I transferred down here. Before January 20 when [the] President flew down there for the last trip when he went out of office, 'course we had several trips down here, and he was trying to set up his people, he promoted several. He went kind of crazy on promotions for some of them, got Cross to be a general and a wing commander out here at the base so he could call on Cross and his people as he said and get what he wanted and go where he wanted when he wanted to so they had the Convair and the T-39. I went to T-39 ground school at Andrews and then I was supposed to get checked out down here in the T-39. We brought two pilots down from Langley with that airplane, which was TAC [Tactical Air Command] headquarters.

I transferred down--on several flights coming down--he was trying to set his people up and get things set up so that he could, I hate to say operate, but that's what it amounted to, and the one trip down there he called me back to the cabin and you kind of have to know the guy, which I thought I did, and know what to expect, because he'd throw a question at you like, "What are you going to do?" That's a blanket question, "What are you going to do?" Well, he called me back there one trip in flight and he said,

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"Okay, now. I'm going to be going out of the office here now pretty soon. What are you going to do?" Well, heck, I didn't know what to say and I sort of stuttered and I said, "Well, I don't know Mr. President," but I said, "One thing for sure when you go out of office of January 20, my wing commander has already told me that there's no position in our wing for me." In other words, he had just made a change over at Washington National. We had a detachment over there. He already has a man in charge of that and he just put him over there. There's no openings for a squadron commander in either squadron for me.

G: You were Lieutenant Colonel at this time?

T: Yes. So he's telling me that I'm going to be transferred and I said, "I have not been to Vietnam," and I said, "I'm not going to volunteer either, but I wear the blue suit and if they tell me to jump, I have to say, 'How high?'. The day that you go out of office my name goes into the tube." He said, "What do you mean?" And I said, "They've already pulled my file and they're looking for a job for me somewhere in the air force." Well, he says, "We'll see about it." And he just turns away, and that's it, you might as well leave, so I went back to the cockpit. Well about three weeks later we had another trip down. In the meantime we were bringing--flying things down, his personal belongings and things out of the White House, personal gifts and what have you, so a navy medic came up and he said, "Hey, Colonel, the President wants to talk to you." Okay. So I went back and just he and Mrs. Johnson were in the compartment and I went in there and stood there and he said, "Well, now what are you going to do?" And he said, "Have you done anything about coming down here? There ought to be a little prestige in flying an

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ex-president around. I'm not going to sit down here in a rocking chair, I'm going to be on the move." I said, "Well, Mr. President, I haven't done anything about it, but if you want me to transfer down here I'll call and get some orders." He said, "Well, you'd better do it quick because my man's going out," and that was Secretary of the Air Force [U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff] [John P.] McConnell and he said, "My man's going out," and I said, "Yes, sir."

So about three weeks later same damned thing. A guy came up and he said, "Hey, the President wants to talk to you, and bring your map." Well this particular flight, we always--we need the long way around, but anyway we would take off from Andrews and we'd get a radar vector to the nearest little point out there southwest of Andrews and we'd fly to Nashville, Memphis, Little Rock, Shreveport, and start our descent from Shreveport direct. Well, we weren't going that way and we'd taken a long route around, all the way around, so I got back there and he said, "What's the shortest way to Texas?" I told him. Direct Nashville, Memphis, Little Rock, Shreveport, Austin. Well how come you're not going that way?" I said, "Because there are severe thunderstorms all over the Dallas area, all around." He said, "Well I want to land in Dallas. I want to drop Marie [Fehmer] off." That's his secretary.

I said, "No sir Mr. President. We're not going to Dallas because of the weather, severe thunderstorms. That's why we're going around." And Marie is embarrassed and she said, "Oh, Mr. President. I don't have to go home." He said, "I want you to go home." Well he's just kind of fussing at me. I said, "Well, Mr. President. I would suggest that we wait until tomorrow when the weather passes out of there and we take

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that little Jet Star and take her up there tomorrow." "Well, okay." He said, "Now, what have you done about [inaudible] to come down here?" I said, "Well, sir, I got hold of Secretary Zuckert, secretary of the air force, got hold of McConnell and they're cutting orders on me. Going to transfer me down to Bergstrom." "Good, good, good." Then he says, "Now, I want this chair taken out of here." (Laughter)

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

G: The President had turned to you and said, "Now, I want you to take that chair out of here."

T: You probably saw this president's planes and pilots and planes on PBS [Public Broadcasting System]? Jimmy Stewart narrated that and Ralph Albertazzie was pilot for Nixon. He refers to one incident on there when he said he received a call from Paul Thornhill about taking things off the airplane. Well that wasn't so because I never did call Ralph at all. I didn't talk to him about that at all. I only told one person about that chair and that was my wing commander. Wing commander called Cross and Cross was down here as wing commander down here. Well, no, I take it back, Cross was in the process of coming down here I guess. But anyway, he liked that chair and he wanted it on the 239 so he could sit back and relax and swivel. That's all there was about that story.

G: There are stories that he virtually had *Air Force One* stripped when he left.

T: Well, that's not really true. You have to understand that by taking things off the airplane it's not stripping the airplane, it's taking things off if there's china on there for instance that has his name on it and we had ash trays with LBJ or Johnson on it. Cigarettes,

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playing cards and all that sort of thing had his name and had the seal on it, presidential seal, Lyndon B. Johnson and cigarette lighters and that sort of thing. Those were the items that were taken off the airplane. That's what they mean by stripping the airplane and so when you say did he strip the airplane right away somebody that doesn't--was not in the wing or not familiar with the wing or with the presidential mission at all would right away say, "Well, that son of a gun, he stole everything off the airplane." Well, that's not true, see, it's just not the case. So that's what they meant by that.

G: So it's not as bad as it sounds?

T: No, absolutely not. No. No, it was just--well, they just don't understand, I guess.

G: Now, you came down here to check out in the T-39. What happened next?

T: Well, when I transferred down here in March of 1969 I checked in here to base about the fifteenth of March, was on the base about fifteen days and they cut orders and I--this was all prearranged--and I went to Denver, they sent me up to Denver to Frontier Airlines who was flying Convair 580s. Government contract and I went through their ground school up there, simulator and ground school, and was to come back down here then, which I did, and they--two pilots here, Aho and Eberhardt, and they proceeded to give me my flight training and check me out in the airplane. So I checked out in the airplane and then that left a T-39 to be checked out into so that I'd be dual qualified so I could fly him in either one and of course we had a helicopter then also, which of course I wasn't chopper rated but in the process of my flight training in the Convair you get qualified in one airplane before you take on the other one. We're also flying other missions and of course I'm in charge of flight management here at the base in scientific group in charge of

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flight management responsible to the Twelfth [Air Force] and the whole base for flying purposes.

Somewhere in the process the story got out and hit the papers that President Johnson had quite a regime built up down here, two airplanes, a helicopter, and a whole bunch of people tied up. And he got sore about it and he said, "Just take everything out. Just do away with all of it. Absorb yourself in Twelfth Air Force or whatever." So I found myself just flying the Convair. They sent the T-39 back, did away with it and transferred some of the people and I don't know what ever happened to the helicopter. I guess they brought in another--I meet people all the time that say they flew Johnson. Well, I don't know whether they really did or not; if they did it was after my time.

But anyway, we just disbanded everything and we just found ourselves in TAC. I found myself flying the Convair on passenger runs throughout TAC from here to other bases; fly passengers, fly the inspection team from here up to another base for inspection tour. I came back one time and I said, "Well shoot if this is what it's going to be, why heck with it."

Now in the meantime, see I said before that Johnson went sort of crazy on promotions. He promoted certain people so when Cross was going to be coming down here as wing commander and of course Johnson wanted him to be a general, nominated him for general and it was approved by the Senate and he sure enough did become BG [Brigadier General] but he jumped a lot of people. So McConnell and other heads up there got their heads together and they said, "Well, Cross ought to go to Vietnam, get some combat experience. So they set that up. They sent him over there and of course he

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was by that time he was qualified in the RF4C out here that was another requirement.

The wing commander has to be qualified in the type airplane you have, so they sent him over to Vietnam but before he left Cross told me and gave me a copy of a letter that he wrote to Jim Jones and Jim Jones passed it on to the President. President of course communicated with McConnell and made the rounds and got back. Cross mentioned to him that I'd been with him a long time and he thought that I should have been promoted. Well I had just been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. I wasn't even in the secondary zone. See, they have a primary zone and a secondary zone for promotions. I wasn't even in the secondary zone for full colonel and I have that letter out there laying on my desk; I was going to show to you.

But the letter says--McConnell's telling this to the President--my case, says, "Thornhill's case is different from Cross' in that I am not in the secondary zone. However, if you want him promoted, I will promote him. I'll see to it. Even though I'm going out of office I will see that my successor handles it, and Thornhill gets promoted. Or, we can wait until the next promotional cycle," which would have been in September of 1969, that's when the board was to meet. Okay. And then Haywood Smith got into the act. He was a marine aide that Johnson put in. He worked under Cross; he was one of the assistants under Cross and he just kept him on. Cross told me, he said, "Now Smith will probably screw it up."

Well Haywood said, he suggested also that they follow McConnell's plan or one of the plans or alternate choices that I be promoted on the next cycle which meant I wouldn't have been promoted until September. I'd have to wait one more year to pin it on

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and then you're stuck for two more years, which would give me something like thirty-one years. So I just turned that down. When I came back from this trip and I got to thinking about all this and said, "Shoot, I'm just wasting my time. I'd have been better off if I'd have gone to Vietnam, gone ahead and gone over there and gotten promoted and let it go that route. But, you know, you look back and say well, "What would have been the right thing to do?" I don't regret getting out. So anyway, I went ahead and got out then.

G: And how many years did you have in at that time?

T: I get paid for twenty-eight. I was in reserve and I had a five-year break so I get credit for that five years. I had a little over twenty-three active and five years reserve so I get paid for twenty-eight years. But I'd like to have had, a selfish reason I suppose or ego or whatever you call it, but I'd have liked to have been the colonel, but I don't regret getting out. We've enjoyed it. I have and I elected not to take a flying job and live out of the bay like I did before and so we're content.

G: What decided you to retire in Austin?

T: When we transferred down, my oldest daughter--in 1969--oldest daughter graduated from Maryland. The youngest daughter was a freshman at Maryland and she wanted to transfer to UT [The University of Texas at Austin], large college and we talked her out of it. We said, "Why don't you go to San Marcos [Southwest Texas State University, now Texas State University, San Marcos]. It's a smaller college, you'll get more professional help, more tutor--closer relationship with the teachers down there." Well, she did and so our plan was to stay here for three years until she got out of college and then we were going to go back up to Tennessee and live with an old aunt and uncle, take care of them.

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They were on twenty-four acres and they had no children and we liked them, they liked us and I liked Tennessee and all that. But anyhow we stayed here and in the meantime my aunt died and my uncle's older brother came in to live with him which changed the whole picture and we were established here. We bought this house in July of 1969 and we've been here ever since. And Debie graduated from San Marcos and we just stayed here.

G: Did you have any dealings with LBJ in his post-presidential years?

T: No. I didn't. I sure didn't. No. When I decided to retire I went down to the federal building. I wanted to tell him before I told Cross or anybody else. I went down to the federal building and he had just departed. He had just come down the elevator and just gone. He was going up to somewhere, out to the Library or somewhere to make a speech, but I did run into Tom Jones who at that time was his number one man down here. And I told Tom, I said, "I want to see the President."

G: Tom Jones or Tom Johnson?

T: Tom Johnson, I'm sorry. Johnson. And I said I wanted to see the President. He said, "Well, gosh, Paul. He just departed." He said, "What is it? What's the problem?" And I told him, I said, "I want to get out, I want to retire. I want to quit." He said, "Well, I'll guarantee you one thing, he'll know within the hour. I'll tell him." So I said okay. Well the President never did call me. He called Cross and he said something to this effect, he says, "What the hell is going on? What the hell did you do that my little feller's going to quit me?" Cross was dumbfounded because I hadn't told Cross so it got me in bad with him and he's wing commander out there and I'm still under him, really, so Cross called

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me and chewed my butt. He said, "What the hell did you tell the President?" "I didn't tell the President anything. I told Tom Johnson I'm going to retire." Well he was kind of upset about it, Cross was, so he said, "Well, okay. I sure wish you'd have told me. I said, "Well, I wanted to tell him first."

So in the meantime I'm getting back feedback, then, through Tom Johnson. He said the President wanted to know if a transfer back to Washington D.C. would keep me in and I said, "No, sir." He said, "Well, you're going to get promoted," and I said, "Yes, sir, but I want to get out." So then I went in and talked to [the] wing commander out here and he wouldn't sign the--of course it was Cross. Cross wouldn't sign my application. I'd put in an application for retirement and the reason why and a waiver because I hadn't served my two years as lieutenant colonel. So he wouldn't sign it so he sent me to the deputy and the deputy, he gave me a hard time and said he wouldn't approve it. I said, "I don't give a damn whether you approve it or not. If you want to disapprove it, disapprove it. And he looked at me and he smiled and said, "You must have a lot of help up there." And I said, "Yes, I've got a lot of help up there." Well I called the secretary of the air force, his office, and they had a man up there by the name of Simokaitis and Frank went on--he was a colonel and he went on--I think he's a two star general now. He's a good man.

G: Can you spell that or do you know how?

T: S-I-M-O-K-I-T-A-U-S [S-I-M-O-K-A-I-T-I-S], I think it is. Simokaitis. Anyway, he told me exactly what to put on. He said, "Paul, you're going to get promoted. I've checked around and there's no ill feelings that I can find out by other people, promotees

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you know, where people would get promoted"--that I maybe passed them over, rather. I said, "Well, I understand all that, appreciate it, but it's time to get out." He said, "Boy, you must have a damned good offer." I said, "No, I don't have any offers at all. I'm just going to get out" and I really didn't have any offers. I just made up my mind to get out. So he told me exactly what to put on my application word for word and it went through just like that, no hitches at all. So I don't know whether I made a mistake or not. Like I said, though, I don't regret it. But after that I had no contacts. We'd send little gifts. Not little gifts but like a birthday package of instead of flowers we'd send fruit or something like that. We'd get a little card back and a thank you note from him and Mrs. Johnson, so it was nice.

G: You say the Rome trip was a long and hectic flight?

T: Yes.

G: Did you know where you were going at any given moment?

T: Yes, there was changes when we went into Rome. I don't remember where we were supposed to go. I don't remember where we were on the leg on that--let's see, the leg prior to that. But anyway, there was a change, [and] that's when we decided to go into Rome and then there was a problem of which airport. There were several airports and we landed--the backup airplane landed at a different airport than the other one did.

G: Was there a reason for that?

T: I really don't recall what the reason was. If Cross was here we could sit and we could probably hash these things out but I don't remember. Like I said, memory fades.

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G: Which trip was that they made the stop at the Azores to let everybody go Christmas shopping because they hadn't had a chance. Do you remember that one?

T: Oh, yeah. I remember that. I don't remember exactly what trip it was but I know that we did stop at Azores and they opened up the BX [Base Exchange] for us. Sure did.

G: And you got to go at least buy something?

T: Yes. And on one of those trips that must have been the one in 1967, in long about December 1967, when we took him around the world I think. We went to Bangkok on that trip and on one of those flights he gave each one of us a gift right after we got back for Christmas and I have a little note that's with it. He bought or gave me a star sapphire tie pin and there was a little note with it, just in a small box, a little note and it was typed by Marie Fehmer and she said, "Paul, your President wants you to have this in memory of our three-and-a-half or four-and-a-half-day trip," whatever it was. You know, I misplaced that note, it's somewhere. I have a footlocker with all my mementos in it. I can't find that little note. (Laughter) It's in there somewhere I suppose in some of the papers but anyway I've got a lot of little gifts that he gave me that I won't lose.

G: You've got a wall full of pictures, I see.

T: Yes. He gave my daughter one, a picture of Lynn for a wedding gift and we've got one there of the pope that he signed, he sent, gave me, he and the pope. It was good duty. I sure enjoyed it for--I was born in a small town back in Ohio and a couple of hundred people so I feel kind of proud that I was associated with the president that way.

End of Tape 2 and Interview I

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