

INTERVIEW V

DATE: March 18, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: MELVIN C. WINTERS

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mr. Winters' office, Johnson City, Texas

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Okay, sir. This is 1961, right after the election when he went back to Washington as vice president, and one of the first things that came up was John Connally was appointed secretary of the navy, and that created a certain amount of stir, I guess. Did he talk to you about that? Was that his suggestion?

W: That was his suggestion.

G: It was.

W: It was, and he had trouble getting John to accept it.

G: What was the objection?

W: I don't know. John just wasn't ready for it. But he did accept it.

G: Yes. Did they have trouble getting the Kennedys to accept that idea?

W: Yes, they sure did.

G: They did. They didn't know Connally, or--

W: Well, they didn't know him. They had other people they'd rather put in.

G: Do you know how LBJ persuaded them?

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W: No, I don't. I know that it was a hassle, but I know he got it done.

G: Did Connally ever say anything to you about why he didn't--he was reluctant, is that right, you say?

W: He was reluctant to accept it.

G: Did he ever talk to you about why?

W: No. No, I don't know why.

G: [Ralph] Yarborough objected, apparently, too. Do you remember anything of that?

W: All I know is that he didn't like him.

G: He didn't like him?

W: No, because he was with Lyndon. That's only one of the reasons I'll give you there, I don't know. (Laughter)

G: They came back to Johnson City in February, about the middle of the month, in 1961, just about a month after the inauguration, and spent about a week, and that was the week when they had the Convair crash out here by town. And I think you told us about that last time.

W: The *Lucy B*.

G: The *Lucy B*. Am I correct that you were present when the wreck was found?

W: I found the wreck.

G: You found it.

W: Me and my son found it.

G: Then they had the funerals for the pilot and the copilot just a couple of days after.

Let me ask you just a general question. You said off tape before that LBJ was restless as vice president. Why do you think that was?

W: I don't know.

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G: Did he not have enough to do?

W: I think it was mainly he didn't have enough to do. I'm sure that's probably the answer to it.

I never thought of it like that, but probably, knowing him, there just wasn't anything to do.

G: How would he exhibit this restlessness? Was he jumpy, or what?

W: Well, he didn't want to be still; he wanted to be moving all the time.

G: Was he unhappy, would you say?

W: I would say that he wasn't very happy. They didn't consult him, the Kennedys didn't, at all.

He wasn't called in and told everything.

G: They say that he was present at most of the big meetings, but not asked for an opinion.

W: Right, right. And that's probably what he was resenting. I don't know.

G: Did he get along with John Kennedy all right?

W: As far as I know, yes. As far as I know, he got along with him fine.

G: Which among the Kennedys didn't he like? I guess Bobby.

W: Bobby. Bobby was the one in his hair all the time. But I believe he really kept Bobby on a pretty good while after he became president himself.

G: Yes, he kept him as attorney general. Did he talk to you about his lack of friendliness with Bobby? Do you have any insight into why they didn't like each other?

W: No, no.

G: What about some of the other Kennedy people, the cabinet people, for example? Did he talk to you about his impressions of them? [Robert] McNamara or [Dean] Rusk, or any of those?

W: Well, he liked McNamara, and he liked Rusk, I know that. He sure liked both of them, I know that.

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G: What about Douglas Dillon; did he say anything about him?

W: No. If he did, I don't remember.

G: That spring in 1961 was when they bought that big house in Washington, The Elms, and apparently it took them a good while to find a house that they liked. Do you remember anything about that house search?

W: No, we were in it after they bought it, spent some time in it.

G: In April, I have a note that he went to Nashville and got a Tennessee walking horse from Governor Buford Ellington.

W: [Inaudible] made him president.

G: Was that the Lady B?

W: I don't know what he named that. I believe it was Lady B.

G: Was that Mrs. Johnson's horse?

W: Well, maybe it was.

G: Also in April was when Konrad Adenauer came to the Ranch that time, and they had a big to-do for him. Were you involved in that?

W: I was involved [inaudible]. And he stayed in my room up there.

G: Konrad Adenauer did?

W: Yes. [Inaudible] He enjoyed everything real well.

G: Did he? They had a lot of the German-speaking people there?

W: They had a lot of them.

G: Did Mrs. Winters talk to him?

W: I don't remember whether she did or not; I don't know.

G: They went to church in Stonewall, I have a note.

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W: I remember that, yes.

G: What was that priest's name that was out there?

W: Oh, gosh. I know it as well as I know my own, if I can think of it.

G: That was one of LBJ's favorites, wasn't he?

W: Yes. Father Schneider.

G: Father Schneider, that's right. Wunibald Schneider. Do you remember anything else about that visit that stands out? I know they had a barbecue for him at the Ranch. Were you involved in getting that ready?

W: No, they had that catered out of Fredericksburg. Somebody catered that; I believe it was out of Fredericksburg. I was there.

G: Then they had a reception at the Fredericksburg fairgrounds, I think.

W: Yes.

G: In May was when LBJ made that Far Eastern trip and went to Vietnam for the first time. Did he talk about that trip when he came home?

W: Well, yes, he did talk about it. And I felt like the general public thought: he ought to just drop a bomb on Hanoi and get it over with.

G: Of course, this was pretty early, now, this was in 1961, when he was still vice president.

W: Oh, this wasn't after he was president?

G: No, this was before then. He went out for Kennedy in 1961, and he met that president of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem.

W: Yes.

G: That was when he called Diem the Churchill of Southeast Asia.

W: I don't remember much about that part.

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G: He visited with Chiang Kai-shek, too. Did he say anything about that?

W: No, not that I remember.

G: This was also the trip when he went to India, and supposedly gave a rebel yell in the Taj Mahal to check out the acoustics. You don't recall that one?

W: No.

G: Okay. In May he dedicated the Austin airport. Were you present at that?

W: Probably was; it seems like I was. I don't know. May have been; I just don't know.

G: Do you know how he felt about the Trinity River Project that they've been trying to get for so many years? They were going to canalize the Trinity River from the bay all the way up to Dallas, I guess.

W: Bring water into Dallas was the theory, wasn't it?

G: I think they were going to make Dallas an inland port.

W: Inland port, right.

G: How did he feel about that project?

W: How did he feel about it? I don't know. I don't know whether he was for it or against it, to tell you the truth. I don't know.

G: His seat in the Senate, of course, was taken by John Tower at this time, when he became vice president. How did he feel about Tower? Did he ever talk about him?

W: Well, he never did like Tower too much, I don't think.

G: Was that just because he was a Republican, do you think?

W: I think so, I think that's it.

G: I have a note here he was trying contact lenses about this time, too. Do you remember that?

W: No. Other than he didn't like them; I remember that.

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G: He didn't like them?

W: He never did like them.

G: They bothered him?

W: They bothered him.

G: Of course, he didn't like to be seen wearing glasses, either.

W: No, no, he didn't like that at all, either.

G: How bad was his eyesight, do you think?

W: I don't think it was too bad, never did think it was real bad.

G: Did he just need glasses to read?

W: I think that more than anything else.

G: Apparently it never affected his shooting.

W: No.

G: That summer, I have a note that he made his first long visit back to the Ranch after the election. This would have been for the Fourth of July holiday, I think, and he addressed the Texas Bar Association in Fort Worth. Do you recall anything about that visit?

W: No. I didn't go, I don't think.

G: It was soon after that that they had Ayub Khan down to the Ranch, the President of Pakistan.

W: I was there for that, I remember.

G: You were? They had a barbecue for him--

W: Yes, I remember all that.

G: --and took him to dinner at the Llano ranch. What ranch was that, do you know?

W: Yes, we called it the Haywood place.

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G: Oh, that's the Haywood place.

W: That's the Haywood place. My wife and I both were up there.

G: What did LBJ think of Ayub Khan? Did he talk about him?

W: No, not a whole lot that I remember anything about. We were there at the Haywood ranch for that [inaudible].

G: I have a note here that he met with General [Douglas] MacArthur. Do you remember him ever talking about General MacArthur?

W: Yes.

G: What kind of opinions did he express?

W: He had a very high opinion of MacArthur.

G: Did he?

W: He sure did.

G: What did he think when Truman fired him? Did he talk about that?

W: No. He wasn't for it by a whole lot, but he's had a whole lot of visibility [?].

G: Do you know if he agreed or disagreed with the firing of MacArthur?

W: No, I don't.

G: Let me just clear up something you said in your last interview. You said that he supported Eisenhower over [Adlai] Stevenson, and I'm wondering if you meant that he felt personally favorable, or if he actually privately favored Eisenhower to his friends, because he was campaigning for Stevenson, obviously. But was he saying something else privately about Eisenhower?

W: Well, the only thing I've ever heard him say about Eisenhower was, he respected him a whole lot. I remember he had a high opinion of Eisenhower.

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- G: But what I'm getting at is, to your knowledge, did he ever tell people to vote for Eisenhower?
- W: Not that I know of, no. I don't ever recall any of that.
- G: In August of that year, he went to Berlin on a visit for Kennedy, and he came back, I guess, for his birthday. Did he talk about that Berlin trip at all?
- W: Not other than that he enjoyed seeing the country and everything.
- G: The day after his birthday I have a note that he went to Nugent Cox's funeral in Johnson City. Who was Nugent Cox?
- W: Nugent Cox--well, he was not a relative--Cox's brother, when I first came to Johnson City, owned the only garage in town, had a Ford agency.
- G: Okay, I think they still had that later on, didn't they?
- W: For many, many years, yes. I think the brother stayed there until they all died out. Ohlen Cox was the last one that died. And Ohlen Cox had married his first cousin.
- G: Ava.
- W: Ava.
- G: Okay. In September, apparently, is when the Johnsons moved into that big house, The Elms, in Washington. Did he ever talk to you about The Elms? Was he happy with that house, do you think?
- W: Well, I don't know why he wouldn't have been; it was a wonderful place. I don't know why he wouldn't have been.
- G: I understand he had a swimming pool and Muzak in the walls.
- W: Oh, yes. Everything you could think of.

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G: Hurricane Carla came in September of that year, and LBJ came back to tour the damage.

Did you go with him on any of those trips? They went down to Houston to look at the hurricane damage.

W: I made all that tour, but I believe I made it with the commanding officer from Galveston, I think, because I did a lot of that work.

G: A lot of the repair?

W: [Inaudible] See, we had a big area there that took in Port Arthur, I remember all that, that dike and those levees and everything; we repaired all that.

G: Sounds like a pretty big job.

W: It was a tremendous job. And we had two or three road outfits going; I pulled all that equipment off and moved it in there. I remember that.

G: In October I have a note that Speaker [Sam] Rayburn went into the hospital, I guess with his final illness. He was in Dallas, and LBJ went up to see him. Did you see the Speaker on any of those trips?

W: No. I went to his funeral with Lyndon.

G: Also in October was when the famous camel driver came to Austin.

W: I remember him.

G: Bashir Ahmad. He had him out to the Ranch. Did you meet him?

W: Yes, I sure did.

G: What kind of a guy was he?

W: Well, I didn't talk to him much. (Laughter) But I remember meeting him. He was quite a character.

G: He was? What did LBJ think of him?

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W: I don't know. Of course, he got a lot of publicity over just entertaining a camel driver. I don't know.

G: Some people have speculated that he kind of got trapped into that; that when he said, "Come see us sometime" that--

W: Right, I think that's right.

G: Do you?

W: I do.

G: Did he say something on that order to you, or--

W: Well, it was kind of a surprise to him when he came, I think that. But he made the best of it.

G: Okay. I have a note that he was hunting at the Chupadero Ranch. Was that Wesley West's ranch?

W: Wesley West.

G: And they were hunting in October, so I guess that would have been for birds, then.

W: Could have been.

G: Because it was a little too early for deer, wasn't it?

W: Too early for deer.

G: In November he had the Mexican comedian, Cantinflas, down to the Ranch. Did you meet him?

W: Yes, we were up there one day.

G: What was his friendship with Cantinflas? That seems to be a kind of a--

W: I don't know. It's one of those deals kind of like that camel driver: "Come see me sometime," or something. (Laughter) That's what I think it was, but I don't know.

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G: Then in November, Rayburn died, of course. Did LBJ take that pretty hard?

W: He took it real hard. I went to the funeral from here, with him.

G: You went with him from here. How did you travel?

W: I believe by car, as well as I can remember. I think we went all the way by car.

G: Pretty long trip.

W: Yes, it sure was. I think that's the way we went; I know it is.

G: Then, after the funeral, he went back to the house. Did you go back with him?

W: To the Ranch house?

G: No, back to Rayburn's house.

W: Yes, I guess I did. I was up there all the time he was at that funeral. I guess I did.

G: Okay. Did he come back to the Ranch after that?

W: I believe he did; I think that's where he ended up after that.

G: What was his mood like? Can you remember anything that he said?

W: Well, he had just lost, he said, one of the best friends he ever had, and the most loyal friend he ever had, at least, that's what he expected from Rayburn.

G: Did he call him Mr. Sam?

W: Mr. Sam. Always Mr. Sam.

G: Did you ever see him kiss him on his bald head?

W: No, I never did.

G: They say he did that.

W: I've heard that too, but I never did see it.

G: Did you get together that night and talk about Mr. Rayburn?

W: After the funeral?

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G: After the funeral.

W: We might have; I don't know. We were on that trip together, I remember that, and we made it by car.

G: You mean came back by car as well?

W: Yes, sure did.

G: That is a long trip.

W: A long drive.

G: I wonder why he didn't fly?

W: I don't know.

G: That was a long time for LBJ to be sitting in a car. What would he do to pass the time, all that time?

W: Oh, he'd talk your head off. He'd think of something to keep you awake. (Laughter)

G: Did he have a phone in that car, and did he use it?

W: I don't remember whether it had a phone or not. It probably did, but I don't remember.

G: I have a note that Mrs. Johnson had stopped off in Santa Fe because her brother had a heart attack up there, and that was why she wasn't at the Rayburn funeral. Do you recall that; is that true?

W: Yes.

G: Which brother was that, do you know?

W: Tom, her brother Tom, I'm sure. I believe that was the brother [inaudible]. He was her favorite brother; they were awful close.

G: Well, he would have been kind of young to be having a heart attack, wouldn't he?

W: Yes, he sure was. He died young.

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(Interruption)

G: In your estimation, just going back to the vice presidency in general, did LBJ voice any resentment toward any of the Kennedys? Now, you say he got along pretty well with John and that he didn't get along very well with Bobby. But anybody else in the Kennedy camp that he resented or felt was treating him badly, or whatever?

W: No, I don't--they didn't call him in and consult on everything. They'd do it, and then he'd find out about it. I think that's what--

G: Do you think this was because they didn't hold him in high esteem?

W: I don't know. I don't know what they [inaudible]. But he never was close to them.

G: Is it fair to say that LBJ resented that whole Eastern Harvard establishment?

W: Yes, yes, it's a very true statement. (Laughter)

G: It is?

W: I think so.

G: Did he remark on this kind of thing?

W: No, but there was resentment there, there's no question about it.

G: Did he think they felt that he was too country, or--

W: I think so. I think that's the attitude they took. Bound to have been.

G: Anything else on this first year of the vice presidency, on 1961, anything that stands out in your mind? Do you think he regretted taking the vice presidency after he was in it for a while?

W: Yes, I do.

G: Did he ever talk about getting out?

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W: No, never did. Never did talk about it. And like I told you, he was at the house that evening when a plane picked him up and took him on to Dallas, and he was president the next day, sworn in.

G: Did he ever say to you in so many words, "I should have never taken this job," or--

W: As vice president?

G: As vice president.

W: No, he never did say that to me. I never recall that. I'll say he was an unhappy vice president. (Laughter)

G: Of course, he had been a very powerful man as Senate majority leader. Did he ever say that he was trying to get more to do as vice president, that he was looking for--

W: I think he would have liked to have had a more active role. I believe I'm saying that right.

G: He had, of course, an enormous amount of experience in Washington, and apparently it wasn't being used.

W: No, that's right. Maybe that was it.

G: And Kennedy was having a hard time getting his legislation through. Did LBJ ever say something on that score?

W: No. If he ever did, I don't remember it.

G: You can't say, then, that he was disloyal, that he was--

W: No, I don't think he was ever disloyal to him. But I think he felt like he was just pushed back.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview V

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