

INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 2, 1976
INTERVIEWEE: H. A. (TONY) ZIEGLER
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Office of Mr. Charles Boatner, Fort Worth, Texas

This interview is on the last section of Tape 2, pages 55-67, and at the end of Tape 3, pages 71-72, Interview IV, Charles Boatner.

- B: You might start in with your first meeting with Lyndon and how you got associated with him in the NYA. Say what your name is and so forth for the transcriber.
- Z: I'm Tony Ziegler, and my first contact with LBJ was through C. N. Avery in Austin. Avery had been Congressman Buchanan's campaign chairman for years. So I had worked for the Texas Quarries stone company, and Avery was one of the officials of this company. C. N. happened to be in Washington the day that LBJ was appointed state director

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of the National Youth Administration for Texas, and LBJ told me later that after he got his appointment he went down to the dining room there in the house and C. N. Avery tapped him on the shoulder and said, "I've got a friend by the name of Tony Ziegler that would like to have a job. I'd like for you to interview him when you get ready to hire down in Texas." LBJ told me that, that C. N. tapped him on the shoulder. So I had an interview then with LBJ and he hired me.

Then we'd work late every night. We was working on the student aid part of it then, so a lot of times we'd be there at eleven or twelve o'clock at night. LBJ would come by or be there and sign the payrolls and send them on in to the WPA at Austin, who processed them and sent them their checks. I guess after about six weeks one day LBJ asked me to go to San Antonio with him, and he said, "Ask your wife if she wouldn't like to go. I'll take Lady Bird and we will the four of us go to San Antonio. We'll go over to the WPA and work out some deals over there, and then we'll have dinner together and come on back." We had a very enjoyable evening, and we got accomplished in San Antonio what we wanted to accomplish. We got home that evening and Catherine, my wife, told me, "Tony, that man some day is going to be president of the United States." I said, "Why? What makes you think so?" She said, "I don't know, I can just feel it. When I hear him talk,

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I can just feel it." So later on Catherine told Lady Bird about it. Then through the years we met them in Washington, and we would go up there about every year. When they were living at the Pearl Mesta home we were invited out, and the last thing Catherine said to Lady Bird [was]: "Lady Bird, the next time we come to Washington you will all be in the White House." She said, "Oh, that couldn't be." So sure enough, the next time we were in Washington they were in the White House.

G: What was your function in the NYA?

Z: My function in the NYA? At first I was working on the student aid, and then in the fall just before the start of 1936 LBJ sent me to Wichita Falls to open a district office in Wichita Falls, Texas. Then something interesting. I'd been there about, oh, probably a week or ten days, and LBJ sent Sherman Birdwell around to check on the boys and see if we were getting anybody to work. You see the OPA had assigned the youth and they had to pay for them, and we had to keep time on the youth. In other words, it was a deal where they had more work than they could do, and then it was talking them into taking on this extra work of NYA. So Sherman Birdwell came up there one Sunday night. I'd talked to a couple of girls at the OPA personnel office and they said they'd work on Sunday night, and the personnel director said he would.

B: That's the Birdwell ranch family?

Z: No, Sherman Birdwell. He owned an interest in the Cook Funeral Home in Austin. I think he still does. But he'd been a friend

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of LBJ's for a long, long time. So Sherman got up there on the train from Fort Worth and Denver and got in about nine-thirty or ten o'clock that night. He knew our office was in the radio building in Wichita Falls, up on the sixth floor. So he said when he got off the train and went over two blocks to the hotel he thought he'd locate the radio building, and he located the radio building. It was just two blocks from the hotel. He saw a lights up there on the sixth floor, so he came on up. There was about seven people from OPA working for NYA there at ten o'clock on Sunday night. He said, "Well, I'll have a good report then to give to LBJ. I'll take out early in the morning, and I can get an extra day's work in." He said, "You know, LBJ never wants us to waste a minute if we can keep from it."

G: Did he ever tell you how he got that appointment, who influenced his getting the NYA directorship?

Z: No, he never did tell me. Congressman Buchanan was the chairman of the Appropriations Committee; I'm sure he had something to do with it.

G: He used to refer to these people who were with him in these days as NYA boys, people who had gone back--

Z: Yes.

G: Who else did this include? I know that Jake Pickle was involved then and Ray Roberts.

Z: Ray Roberts, Arthur Brisbane--he lives in San Antonio now. I don't know how many. There couldn't be too many of those. That was written the last full day he was in office, and see, he goes clear back to NYA days.

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G: Yes. Sure is.

Z: I'll get you to see that charter.

G: What was unique about Texas that was lacking in other NYA states? What really distinguished the program that he directed in Texas?

Z: I think one of the big things was getting sponsors to sponsor projects. In other words, not let Uncle Sam pay for it all, let the cities and counties put some money in it, too. Because LBJ always told me, "The more money or interest or time you can get somebody in on something and then get their names in the paper, they'll help you just that much more, see? But they've got to be a part of it." For instance, later on we had a project, a girls residence center over at Mineral Wells, and the city of Mineral Wells put money in it, I think about fifty or sixty dollars a month. The school district put some money in it, and the city also furnished the water free. Then Jack County and Young County and Palo Pinto County, those three counties' commissioners all put money in and sent the girls from their counties in there. In other words, all together we had about two hundred dollars a month coming in with about six different sponsors. We really tied in there, you see.

Now one of the things where Texas led off fast, too, was in roadside parks. LBJ sold the State Highway Department on the roadside picnic parks. Also, in Wichita Falls--and it's still standing there--we built a three-and-a-half mile cement sidewalk along the state highway from the edge of Wichita Falls out to where

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there was a school out there so these kids would not have to walk on the highway. They could walk on that concrete. The State of Texas and Mr. Woodard's supervisor up there, the State Highway Department chairman, furnished all the materials and all, and all that the National Youth Administration did was furnish the labor. They built several iron bridges, and they taught a couple of our boys how to weld when they built these iron foot bridges. But I'd say he got a lot of people to work right quick.

G: He seemed to identify, I suppose, with the New Deal.

Z: Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

G: Could you sense an admiration for President Roosevelt on his part then?

Z: Yes. Yes, yes.

G: Really?

Z: Yes, there wasn't any question about that.

G: Can you recall anything in particular that he might have said?

Z: No. Once in a while he would refer to him as the Chief and how he wanted us to help these underprivileged youngsters.

G: I believe Mrs. Roosevelt made a tour of some of the Texas projects. Were you on hand then?

Z: Yes. She dedicated the little chapel up here at Denton. You know about that I guess. I was there for the dedication of that. Of course that wasn't in my district; I didn't have anything to do with that. That came under Dallas.

B: Tony, when President Roosevelt would make a fireside chat, would

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Mr. Johnson remind you all that the President was going to speak that night--

Z: Yes, a lot of times he would. Yes.

B: --or point out in memos later what the President had said that pertained to your program?

Z: Yes, he did that.

G: What were some of the worst problems that you faced with the NYA? Do you remember anything in particular that was challenging, too, other than just getting people to work?

Z: The big thing was getting people to work. In other words, you didn't have your own organization to get aboard, you had to depend on talking somebody else out of it.

G: Right. Can you recall any particular problems he might have had, say, with the national office or any of the other state agencies?

Z: Well, the other state agencies--

G: I mean federal agencies, I should say.

Z: Federal and state agencies, too, that we were supposed to work with to LBJ never worked fast enough. They always took too much time. In other words, "We ought to have that done and be on something else by now," see? He was a driver. He wanted to get this done and get that done and do this and do that.

G: Did Aubrey Williams ever come down during this period?

Z: Yes.

G: What were your impressions of him?

Z: I thought that he was a very smart man. In my association with him

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I liked him. He was dedicated to the job he was doing; I mean, he wasn't just working at a job, he was really interested.

G: One of the things I've read about the Texas NYA that was unusual was the program that prepared Negroes for college. It was sort of a summertime prep course. Do you recall that sort of a Head Start for blacks graduating from high school and going into college?

Z: No, I don't remember too much. I know we had these residence centers. We had one down in Inks Dam and one out at Ranger. We had them scattered all over the state where they learned what in NYA we called "work experience" instead of skills, in other words, where they had welding and radio and that. Sometimes the state furnished the instructors and sometimes NYA furnished the instructors, you know.

G: Well now, Senator Wirtz was on that NYA board, Alvin Wirtz.

Z: Yes, Alvin.

G: Did you have much contact with him?

Z: Yes, sir. He attended a lot of our meetings in Austin.

G: Did he?

Z: Yes.

G: What was his role? How did you see his relationship with Lyndon Johnson?

Z: More or less an adviser, just like Robert B. Anderson from up at Vernon, before he was secretary to the Treasury. He was on his committee, too.

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G: Generally, what sort of advice would they give? In what kind of situations?

Z: Just, I'm sure, suggestions for projects, and LBJ was letting them know what was being accomplished on these various projects.

G: I've gotten the impression that Senator Wirtz was his early political mentor, that he gave him a lot of good insights into politics.

Z: Yes. I'm sure of that. Now I worked in two of LBJ's campaigns. I was working for the government, resigned my job and went to work in the campaigns. And Bob Anderson, up at Vernon, wrote a lot of his speeches. He was an excellent speechwriter, Bob was, and Bob would try them out on me then.

G: Which campaigns were these?

Z: That was that first one.

G: For Congress in 1937?

Z: No.

G: Or 1941, the Senate race?

Z: Forty-one, the Senate race, yes.

G: What did you do in that campaign?

Z: I would work with the newspapers and then help set up these
For instance, in this last one, you see, he was going by helicopter. And for instance, I'd go over to Mineral Wells and help. I always had two sound systems. Of course one, you know, is liable to go haywire. So promote two sound systems, so--

G: A backup.

Z: --when he spoke you'd have a backup with you. He'd pat me on the

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back for that. He said, "Old Tony, he's got another one there, so if this one [breaks down] we got another one to stand on." In those days, in jerking them around in cars and that, they could come apart.

G: Do you have any particular recollections of the 1941 campaign when he ran against W. Lee O'Daniel? First of all, his decision to run, were you involved in any of this?

Z: No, I wasn't there.

G: Did you travel with him during that campaign?

Z: Just in the counties around Fort Worth.

G: I see.

Z: Maybe out a hundred, a hundred and fifty miles, like to Wichita Falls. He had me out to take straw polls for him, and he taught me how to take them.

G: How did you do that?

Z: You figure out a town, and then you figure out the percentages of people. In other words, the silk stocking roll, you want to get so many out there, and so many union, you see, and so many Negro where they lived, and the Mexicans where they lived, then you average that all together and you take a poll, and if you're getting about 90 per cent of the vote you're doing awfully good. See what I mean?

G: Sure.

Z: Yes. That was interesting. When he was elected president I made them for about twenty-two counties that I was working, and I didn't miss it over 3 per cent on any county that I had taken these polls in.

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G: That's awfully good.

Z: I sent them to Cliff Carter. You remember him. Or have you heard of him?

G: Sure. Well, back to the NYA. Can you recall his decision to resign the directorship in order to run for that congressional seat after Congressman Buchanan died?

Z: Yes. He had told the boys in the Wichita Falls papers and the boys in the Abilene paper. They knew that some day he was going to run for Congress because he told them. In other words, he was trying to get the newspapers to back him, which they did, when he ran for the Senate later. They were both Harte-Hanks papers.

G: But did he tell you that he was going to resign to run for Congress?

Z: No, he didn't tell me.

G: He didn't.

Z: I just saw it once

G: Yes. I just wondered if you knew of his decision to. How about Mrs. Johnson during this period, was she supportive of him actively?

Z: Yes, all the way through. Yes.

G: Did she prove to be an asset, and if so, how?

Z: Yes, very much of an asset. She could talk for him. You see, she has a degree in journalism, though, from the University of Texas. She's a good writer, and she's just a smart person. I'm an old German candle maker.

G: Well, this is a letter thanking you for a German candle.

Z: Yes, and for twenty years, see. We still send her one every year.

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G: That's something.

Z: We were down to the party they had down there about a month ago, and I saw a lot of the old NYA boys then, Bill Deason, I guess. Have you talked to him?

G: No, but I'm planning to.

Z: Now Bill should be able to help you a lot. Of course, he was what I'd call a third man. See, Jesse Kellam was the first, and then Bill Deason.

G: After LBJ resigned and took the seat in Congress, and I believe Jesse Kellam took over, did the NYA change any in terms of its direction?

Z: No, it was just same way. Jesse's a hard worker, too, just like LBJ.

G: Is he?

Z: Yes.

G: Did LBJ continue to have an involvement with the NYA, or did he leave that to Jesse?

Z: He left more of that to Jesse after he took over.

G: Did he?

Z: Yes.

G: You didn't have to worry about him showing up to see if you were [working]? Anything else on the NYA days that you remember?

Z: No.

G: Did you ever meet his parents back then?

Z: Yes, I met his daddy and his mother, too. He used to have a sister

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who lived here in Fort Worth, and his mother used to ride up here with me a lot. I stayed in Wichita Falls until after he was elected to Congress, and after he was elected to Congress then Jesse Kellam moved me down here. The man quit, and I came down here and took over. Then they did away with the Wichita Falls office; then they were, you know, kind of combining them after they got it running good.

G: Sure. Do you have any particular recollections of his father?

Z: No. His father was a big man like he is I remember, and his daddy had a good sense of humor as I remember it. I wasn't around his daddy too much. I was around his mother more than that. Now his mother used to always save all the newspaper clippings. I used to save a lot of those for her. Anything about LBJ she liked to keep.

G: I suppose you saw him in later life, after he became president and everything.

Z: We had dinner at the White House.

G: Did he like to reminisce about the old days?

Z: Yes. You can tell that by that letter he wrote me on that last day. I'm just a small potato, but there's not many men that would from 1935 up until a couple of years ago remember a person like that on their last day when they were going out. But he evidently was thinking about NYA or he would never have written me a letter. And one thing--of course, I'm not bragging when I say it, but I think you can check with Jesse Kellam or Bill Deason on this--I always got more sponsor's contributions than any of the other

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boys, and LBJ liked that, getting people involved in it, you see.

G: Anything else you want to add?

Z: No, I believe that's about all.

G: If you think of anything else, you can add it later.

Z: Okay.

[End of Ziegler's section of Tape 2, Interview IV of Charles Boatner]

Ziegler makes additional comments on Tape 3, Interview IV of Charles Boatner

Z: [It was] the early part of NYA days, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt was visiting in Texas and was making a trip from Fort Worth to Dallas. LBJ arranged to have a bunch of the boys working on the highway, and he was there with them when President Roosevelt and his caravan went by.

B: Tony, did he have any sign up, that this was the NYA or not?

Z: I'm sure he did. I wasn't here, you see, I just heard about it. I wasn't down there, but I'm sure he did. I know they had their shovels, and they were working when he went by.

G: I believe Mr. Boatner made mention of LBJ getting his staff together in the evenings and having poker games or something and talking about the day's work or what needed to be done.

B: Next day's work.

Z: Yes. I've sat in on some of those sessions.

G: Can you describe them? What were they like?

Z: They were just trying to figure out if a certain project was coming

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along as fast as it should be, you know, or what was holding it up or why we couldn't get this done sooner or that sooner.

B: In other words, he would combine a brainstorming session with--

Z: With ideas. He always wanted [to know]: "Have you got any ideas?"

B: --a little relaxation at the poker table.

Z: Yes, yes. "How are you going to do this better? Is there any way we can do it better, or quicker?"

B: In those days, Tony, did he have a group of social friends and then a group of workers, or did he do his socializing with his staff?

Z: Not all of it. He went to parties where I don't think any of the boys who worked for him were.

B: But he did socialize a whole lot with his staff?

Z: Yes, yes.

B: He took you and your wife--

Z: --to San Antonio for dinner that night, yes.

G: Okay.

[End of Ziegler's comments and of Tape 3 of 3 of Boatner Interview IV]