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JOHN CHANCELLOR ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW I

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JOHN CHANCELLOR

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ACCESSION NUMBER 01-03

INTERVIEWEE: John William Chancellor

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Pierce McSweeny

PLACE: Mr. Chancellor's office, NBC Building, Washington, D.C.

DATE: April 25, 1969

M: I'd like to begin the interview with a very brief outline of your career so that we may sort of relate your activities with that of Mr. Johnson and the events that occurred during his time. You began your news career with the Chicago ***Sun Times*** in 1948 and moved into broadcasting in 1950. You went with Station WNBQ, the NBC station in Chicago. From 1950 to 1965 you had a continuous association with the NBC network, during which time you worked as a news writer, general assignments reporter in the United States, and a foreign correspondent. Your first overseas assignment was in 1948 to Vienna.

C: 1958.

M: 1958, excuse me. And others included London, Moscow, Brussels.

C: And Berlin.

M: And Berlin. In July 1961 you returned to the United States to become host and moderator of the "Today" show, which position you held until 1962. You've also covered the White House and the presidential campaigns and conventions from 1956 through 1968. In 1965 Mr. Johnson appointed you director of the Voice of America, succeeding Henry Loomis. In 1967 you resigned and returned to NBC in your present position as national affairs correspondent. Do I basically have the correct information?

C: Yes, that's right.

M: Have you ever participated in any similar oral history project?

C: No.

M: Since much of your career has been spent reporting and analyzing news events and the people in the news almost daily, I'd like to emphasize in this interview your personal relations with Mr. Johnson, your government position, and your assessment of some of the milestones of his career, and a very important area--his press relations. Do you recall the first time that you covered Mr. Johnson, or reported on him, or had any contact with him?

C: I would have to go back to the mid-1950s for that. It would have been a very tenuous and slender sort of connection. The first time I had a chance to observe the President was in the campaign of 1960. But in 1960 I traveled mainly with Nixon and with Kennedy, so that the answer to your question is that I really had hardly set eyes on the man until early in 1965 when NBC assigned me to the White House as its White House correspondent. This may be significant because I had a great curiosity about Lyndon Johnson and practically no first-hand knowledge about him. I was in a sense kind of a virgin. I had not, as many Washington correspondents had, known him over the years. I didn't have any particular biases about him, and I didn't have any prejudgments. I was very fresh, and I think that was probably important in terms of our relation ship.

M: Do you recall sort of the first impressions that you had, say, back early in the 1960s when you did have a moment to observe him in the 1960 convention?

C: Yes, I think probably I had the traditional response. I didn't see him in the 1960 convention, because I was in Moscow, and I didn't return until after the convention for the campaign. So I missed him in one of his more colorful periods. I've realized that. I've read a lot about it.

But my first impressions of him were that he was bigger than I thought he was and smarter than I thought he was. I found him to be an extremely intelligent man--much more so, I think, than I had been given to believe based on information from the newspapers and television and discussion with friends. I think probably I was average and typical in my reaction to him when I first got to know him because I don't think he'd come across as intelligent as I believe him to be.

M: You mentioned covering the White House in 1965. This would be just prior to your appointment as director?

C: That's when he first set eyes on me. We enjoyed, I think, quite a good relationship when he was president. I was fascinated by the White House. I loved working there as a reporter. And I got to know him, I think, fairly well in terms of how a reporter gets to know a president. But there were many times when we were able to talk. He was then in his period of greatest accessibility for the press. That's when we were going on all kinds of walks around the garden. We'd go for walks in the morning and walks at night. He would have us up into the private quarters. I saw him in his office many times. He was then obsessed with press relations. George Reedy was then the press secretary.

And I remember one day one of our lads here at NBC got the story that Maxwell Taylor was going to leave Saigon. He was then ambassador in Saigon. I got a call from our desk here in Washington that we were going to go with the story—could I check it? And I tried to check it with Jack Valenti, and got an answer from Jack Valenti that—we all did this in a great hurry. The broadcast was going on the 11 o'clock morning newscast on radio, and at about ten minutes to 11 I got Valenti, and I said, "We're going to go ahead with the story that Max Taylor is leaving Saigon," which was a piece of important

political news at the time. And I said, "I just want you to know this." This is kind of a reporter's device. I said, "I want you to know this; we're going to go ahead with it, and do you have anything else to tell us about it?"

He said, "No, I don't have anything else to tell you about it."

And I said, "But you would say, Jack, that this wouldn't mean any change in American policy as far as Viet Nam is concerned."

He said, "No, absolutely not."

And so I thought, well, that's just great because Valenti has just told me that this is true. Parenthetically, it wasn't true. It did take place about four months later, but I think I had foxed Jack. In any case, I went on and did what we call a little shirt-tail, and I said that the White House would not confirm nor deny this, but "if it is true,"—and I'm happy I said that because it didn't turn out to be quite true—"if it is true, it does not mean any change in American policy."

Then I went back to my little cubicle there in the press room and the phone rang, and it was the President. I tell this because it illustrates how he worked. He was furious! He said, "That's not true. Why didn't you ask me? I'm a hundred yards away from you right now. Why didn't you just come in and ask me?" You know, you just don't go in and ask presidents questions like that. I remember answering, I thought for a minute and I said, "Well, Mr. President, I can't come and ask you that. You're running the country." There was this long, sort of solemn pause at the other end. I can't remember exactly what he said, but it was some very weak answer.

But we had many connections with that, and then there was a sort of social connection. I did not know at the time that he was sort of looking at me, sort of putting

me in a manpower pool of some kind which he was making up. And I thought he did that very skillfully. So we would go up to Camp David with him. My wife and I spent quite a bit of time that spring with the Johnsons, and this culminated in my being appointed to the Voice of America job.

M: Do you recall any other sort of illustrations such as the one you have given me that were sort of significant of Mr. Johnson's operating procedure?

C: Yes, I can remember a number. But there was one that sticks in my mind. It would have had to be some time in the spring of 1965. We were just beginning the bombing of North Viet Nam. I can't remember the precise details, but one Sunday afternoon we had a program, a television program on a Sunday afternoon examining—I can't remember—some aspects of the bombing or of the international situation. It was a special program. I had gone down to the White House, which, as you know, is generally deserted in the West Wing on Sunday, to stand in front of the White House and speak a little essay into the camera on what the President's reaction was to something.

As I stood out there waiting for the program to begin, what I didn't know was that the President was upstairs in the Mansion. Lady Bird was in Texas. He was alone, and this was significant. Lady Bird, I think, played a very important role in his life. But he was alone and looking at me out the window, and he got very curious about what I was doing. I guess he got George Reedy or somebody to tell him, not what I was going to say, but what I was going to talk about. And the guard in the West Wing came out and got me, and I went inside. He said, "There's a telephone call for you," and it was the President. He began talking about the subject I was talking on. I wish I could remember; I just can't now, precisely what it was. I suppose I could look it up but it would be hard

to find. Anyway, he gave me sort of a briefing on it, which is normally very valuable to a reporter covering the White House, to have the president talk to you just before you go on the air. But it developed that what he told me was not true at all. And I went and stood out there—it didn't sound right, what he had told me, but nonetheless he was the president, and he'd told me. So I put it into this piece I'd written which changed the balance of the piece a little bit. Then I went back and the following day I was able to determine pretty accurately that what he'd told me was an absolute fabrication, a big lie! I've rarely been as angry. I really was just furious!

Now, looking back on it after having spent four years in Washington after that, presidents use all kinds of tools on reporters to do their work, and I think that my anger has cooled off considerably. But if you want illustrations of how our relations with him were, this is a significant one. He was capable of all kinds of duplicity with the press. And that stands as an example of it to me. I've really never told this to anybody before except a few close friends because you don't go around calling the President a liar. In this case, he was.

M: Do you recall what he was emphasizing that was in contrast with—?

C: I wish I could and I can't. It had something to do with Viet Nam or the Dominican Republic, both of which were cooking up. The Dominican Republic was erupting that spring, and it was on one of those two subjects. As a matter of fact, the more I think about it, the more I think it must have been the Dominican Republic. And the more I think about it, was that it involved the nature of the threat in the Dominican Republic. You'll recall that it was the White House policy line that intervention was necessary in the Dominican Republic because there was a communist threat to the government and to

peace and order there, and to the Americans living there. I think subsequent research has indicated that the White House was in fact vastly overstating that particular case. And I think that when the President called me, this was very much on his mind. So he used the telephone as a kind of an informational and persuasive machine for me the way, as I say, presidents do. Roosevelt did it. Everybody has done it. The present incumbent is probably doing it one way or another. But this is one that happened to me, and I answer on that basis.

M: You spoke of the role of Lady Bird in Mr. Johnson's life. Could you elaborate a little on that for me?

C: I always thought that he was quite lonely when Lady Bird wasn't around. He had a funny attitude. I could express it, I suppose, by saying that he never paid any attention to Lady Bird when she was around, and when she wasn't around, he seemed to miss her badly. I am a great, great admirer of Mrs. Johnson. I think she's a distinguished lady. I think, probably in the long run, she had a great effect on him in smoothing out some of the policies, smoothing out some of the attitudes he had, making him gentle when he ought to have been gentle. I can't be very specific about it because I just don't know. I don't know very many anecdotes about it except that in his kind of gargantuan way she was tremendously patient with him and seemed to me, on the whole a benign influence on him all the way around. In their whole relationship together I think she's very important, but you'd have to go to somebody who knows them in a more personal way than I. 1 just was able to observe this.

M: There aren't any specific instances that come to your mind that reflect this to you?

C: No, just a general pattern of her being protective about him, worrying about him, and being the kind of wife who believes that her husband is the most important thing in the world. This seems to me almost an old-fashioned attitude now, and Lady Bird had it, and she had it in an inspiring degree. She was *his* woman. You knew that. And sometimes it was terribly difficult to be *his* woman. He was not an easy man to be married to; he was not an easy man to associate with in many ways. But she did it, and I think she just did a marvelous job. I wish somebody would strike a medal for Lady Bird.

M: I'd like to go back a little bit before 1965 and just ask you a couple of questions. Were you in this country when John Kennedy was assassinated?

C: No, I was in Berlin.

M: How would you say that Mr. Johnson was regarded abroad at first when he assumed the presidency and as this developed while you were overseas?

C: Well, Jack Kennedy was extremely popular with the Europeans. Lyndon Johnson was not. Jack Kennedy gave the impression of being cultured and Eastern; Johnson gave the impression to the Europeans of being rough and Western. As vice president Lyndon Johnson had made, I think, two trips to Europe, including Scandinavia, and the Europeans thought that his manners were bad. They thought of him as a rustic. He gave ballpoint pens to foreign ministers with his name on them. I remember people who used to come to my house occasionally who had worked on trips with him as members of the government, foreign service officers, or had covered him as press people. They made a lot of fun of him at that time. So I think that when Kennedy died there were two sets of people: one, who, when they realized that Kennedy was dead and that there was a new American president said, "Well, who's Lyndon Johnson! We don't know anything about

him." And another smaller and probably more influential group, a tiny group of people who said, "Oh, my God, not him!" So he started way behind with the Europeans, *way* behind.

M: Did you see any progress?

C: No, I don't think I did. I think that there was a period about the time that the President decided that we would not go ahead with the multilateral, multinational nuclear force—the MLF—I think they began to respect him because that affected them, and this was a foolish gambit that had been thought of. He was sensible enough to—he called us all in the White House one night and we had a private session with him, about fifteen of us up in the Oval Room. I remember in the course of that, that is the first time we learned that he was not going to go ahead with the MLF. He said, "I'm not going to have anybody running all over Europe with his shirttail out telling those people how to handle their affairs." This went down very well with the Europeans.

I think the Europeans had considerable respect for his domestic accomplishments, what he did in terms of race; what he tried to do for the poor; what he wanted to do for the cities; what he wanted to do for the blacks. I think this was, in the main, understood by serious sensitive Europeans and he was respected for that.

But of course the war was what did him in. They saw no sense in it. And I think the Dominican intervention probably didn't help very much. I think this confirmed in their minds that Lyndon Johnson was a trigger-happy president who believed in the use of force to solve international problems. And Viet Nam, of course, became such an enormous millstone that it, I believe, damaged American credibility in all areas with the Europeans, and we're still recovering from that now. I mean, it's still going on.

M: Did Mr. Johnson ever talk with you about his sudden assumption of the presidency?

C: Not that I can recall specifically. I can't remember any particular thing he ever said about that.

M: Did he ever talk with you about friction between the Kennedy family and staff and himself and his staff?

C: Yes, he talked about the "Stacomb" crowd. I never figured out what that was either, and some of us sat down one day and worked it out. What it apparently referred to was some kind of stickum you put on your hair. From his point of view I thought it was an effective use of the language. But the Stacomb crowd were sort of the Easterners around Kennedy. He once told me that he had kept them all on because he didn't want to damage their careers, and one by one they left him, as you know. I can't remember specifically what he said, but the memory I have of it is that he had tried to do everything he could for them, including keeping them in their jobs in the government—and in the White House. And I think the record will show that he did. Then one by one they were replaced, but it wasn't any sudden thing.

Nonetheless, I do think that he had a prejudice against some of the Kennedy style. And I think that Jacqueline Kennedy hurt the Johnsons very, very badly by her refusal to acknowledge them in any way at all. I thought that was very bad manners on her part. In 1965 they dedicated a garden to Jacqueline Kennedy which is still at the White House, and she just ignored all of that. So I think they were wounded by her aloofness, and I think the Johnsons must have been dismayed by the comparisons between the Kennedy style and the Johnson style. They had to be wounded very badly by that because, as you will recall, there were some savage comparisons made in those days. But otherwise, as

far as President Kennedy is concerned, I never heard Lyndon Johnson say anything bad about him.

M: Can you think of an event that particularly started the erosion of relations with what resulted in more-or-less the final break when Robert Kennedy ran for the presidency?

C: I'm not sure that you've put the question in the right way or that I understand it. Do you want to try that again?

M: Was there something that really brought it into the open as a significant beginning that sort of culminated in a final, rather harsh, I think, break, at least it was the way it was conveyed in the news when Robert Kennedy announced his candidacy for the presidency?

C: All I can offer is a theory, and it's the standard one, that Johnson saw Bob Kennedy as a threat to his own supremacy in the party, and the President protected himself against what, I guess we could call, the Kennedy threat—in a very gingerly manner, but nonetheless he protected himself. I can't remember specifically, but wasn't there the announcement in 1964 that Johnson would not allow any member of his cabinet to run?

M: It was early '68. [NB: This may be a reference to LBJ's announcement in 1964 that no member of the cabinet would be considered for the vice presidency.]

C: Early '68. I'm all wrong, that's right. Early '68?

M: Right. When the question was arising whether Robert Kennedy would come into the picture as a candidate.

C: Well, whatever, I'm just four years off.

M: I believe I may be wrong.

C: No. I think that Johnson's behavior toward Kennedy was based on politics, on a matter of survival, on the territorial imperative. I can't recall any specific break, anything that Bob Kennedy said to him, any action that passed between the two men that involved them in any way, that would have in a popular sense turned Lyndon Johnson away from Bob Kennedy. I think both men were set on ineluctable political paths, and that it was inevitable that they would have to move against one another. And they did that out of classic politics, and I don't think personality entered into it very much. You'd have to ask the people who knew Bobby better. I'm sure the President was furious with Bob Kennedy at various stages of this relationship, and I'm sure that Kennedy was furious with the President. But it wasn't just the fact that two men who could have got along together didn't; it was just that history made it impossible for them to get along.

M: I stand corrected. You were right, it was 1964 because it was the vice presidential—

C: That's what it was.

M: And I'm thinking of the 1968 candidacy.

C: That's right.

M: I'd like to proceed on to your appointment to the Voice of America. You were the first working newsman to head the VOA. When were you first approached about this position, and by whom, and did you have any sort of inkling of it?

C: No, I didn't have any inkling of it. NBC was making a film, and I was helping in it. We were making an hour documentary on Lyndon Johnson and the Ranch. You see, I really was quite an innocent. I didn't think that he ever thought that he'd ever appoint me to any job, and I was having a wonderful time; had no thought, no desire to go into government.

And one Saturday in June 1965 I got a call from Valenti. I had wanted to ask the President something about this project, this film we were making. And he called me and he said, "The boss wants to see you. Will you come down?" And I said, "Yes." This was not out of the ordinary, because I was seeing him quite often in those days. So I went down, and we went into the Oval Office, and he said he wanted me to go in the Voice of America. I said I didn't want to go on the Voice of America, "thank you very much," and "goodbye." He wouldn't have that, and he took me over to the Mansion, and I guess we had lunch.

And I was very stubborn about this, and I called NBC in New York and found that the man who was the president of NBC at the time, named Robert Kintner, who later went to work for the President as the secretary of the cabinet, would not support me in this. He wanted to give me to the President as a gift. So I had two presidents against me—my own and the country's. I held out, I think, for twelve days, and those were really a kind of sensational and dramatic twelve days in my life because I didn't want to do it. I really didn't want to do it.

In the end, I found that NBC wouldn't give me any support at all, and the President was using all kinds of persuasive devices on me. There wasn't any arm-twisting. I'm not sure what arm-twisting is, but I think if they can fix it with your employers so that your employers want you to do a thing, that I guess is sort of arm-twisting. But mainly it was just this enormous, highly skilled, intelligent man bellowing away at me day after day that I ought to do this. So in the end I gave in and said I would. Then that was the day of his news conference when he announced me and Abe Fortas. Now, I'm not absolutely certain that Justice Fortas ever did say "Yes," but I had said yes.

And it was against my will. So you have to consider me as sort of a draftee. I didn't want to do it. But I said I'd do it for two years, and I did it, I think, for twenty-three months.

M: Just prior to your appointment, and really even during your service, there was a great controversy surrounding the Voice of America and policy control. There were charges of censorship and direction from above by Carl Rowan and Mr. Johnson himself—and also the idea that we were too righteously picturing U.S. foreign policy abroad. What kind of direction did you get from Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rowan, and how much control did you have in reporting controversial issues?

C: That's a big question. Let me see if I can take it in its various parts. Henry Loomis left the Voice of America—now, I'm piecing together various things I learned at the Voice and the various things I've learned since—and conversations with Loomis and a lot of other people involved.

Any national radio organization—the BBC, Radio Tokyo, Radio Moscow, the Voice of America—exists at what I like to call the intersection of two disciplines. One of those disciplines is diplomacy and the other is journalism. Where these disciplines intersect there are going to be sparks, and there's going to be conflict. Every once in awhile it gets out of hand. I think it was getting out of hand with Carl Rowan when a man named Bernie Anderson, who was sort of the head of all the policy machinery at the USIA—there were people at the Voice who were trying to be perhaps more free than they should be, and there were people at the USIA who were trying to make the Voice's output narrower than it should be. Loomis got caught up in that and resigned, having told some of this to the press—specifically to Mary McGrory of the Washington ***Star***. So when I went in, I was aware that this had gone on. I wasn't aware of its magnitude, and I didn't

know quite how it worked. But I was aware that it was going on. I remember having a conversation with the President in which I said, "If I do this (I guess I'd said by then I would), you're going to have a lot of trouble with me if we get into any policy disagreements."

And he said, "I want you to go down there and run it the way you want it run, and I'll give you all the backing-up I can. So will everybody else in the White House. You're my man down there." He was then going to appoint Leonard Marks as the head of the USIA. He said, "You go and talk to Leonard and tell him I said that, and if you can't agree, then all three of us will get together and we'll agree on the standards."

So I went to Leonard and I said, "If I do this, I want the same freedom I would have if I were running NBC news. I can't take it on any basis narrower than that."

And Leonard said, "Fine."

Now, neither one of us then knew how you ran a thing like that, so that we were both being fairly innocent. But I give the President his due and Leonard Marks his due. They never broke that rule with me. We had policy disagreements about specific things, about small things, but in terms of general news policy at the Voice, which included commentary, I was responsible for it and I decided on its tone, and Leonard backed me up, and it never involved the White House. So Lyndon Johnson kept his word to me, and the Voice, if you'll go back through the records, was relatively serene in that period. There was no trouble. There was no public worrying about the quality of the Voice in terms of its freedom. On the whole I had a very good relationship with the Johnson Administration. And I put it that way because the head of the Voice, it seems to me, should be an almost independent technician, not related to any political organization and

not really acting as the spokesman for the administration. There's a lot of trouble in that direction. So from that orientation, the Johnson Administration played fair and square with me.

M: This was a pretty tenuous time to be explaining our foreign policy abroad, with the Dominican intervention having just occurred, our commitment in Viet Nam escalating rapidly, the bombing of North Viet Nam increasing. What issues caused the most difficulty in reporting?

C: Now how does that relate to a history project on Lyndon Johnson?

M: Because it also reflects his time.

C: I see. I don't know. I suppose it was a very difficult time to try to make the United States plausible, and so what I tried to do was to make the—let me put it this way. It was a difficult time to create a popular image of the United States, so the next best thing you could do was to throw yourself on the mercy of the intelligence of a foreign audience and try to explain the United States to them, because if we didn't have confidence in our own country, then we shouldn't be in the propaganda business. This wasn't any great change, but we emphasized when we were having race riots the progress we were trying to create.

And I must say that the torrent of legislation that moved through the government of the United States under Lyndon Johnson's direction was a relatively valuable asset to a propagandist because, it seems to me looking back on that time, you had every two or three weeks some startling new piece of legislation, some innovation, some evidence of the concern of the federal government for various elements of the American population. So while we would, in a sense, have to grit our teeth and talk about the "B-52s again today," and all of the terrible clichés of the Viet Nam war, we would in the same

newscasts have valid pieces of news dealing with legislation in the United States. I think if we had only been bombing and carrying on the war in Viet Nam without this level of activity domestically, then it would have been a much harder job to talk about the United States.

But Johnson gave us—it was one of the unconscious byproducts of his administration that a propagandist was able legitimately to point up some of the positive things we were doing here at home. And I think in the long run this contributed to an image about the United States which was about as good an image as we deserved at the time, about as good as we could get. And that was that we were untrustworthy abroad, dangerous internationally, but that basically our hearts were in the right place and if only we would get out of Viet Nam, we could go on back to being the decent, concerned people we were giving evidence of being through this legislation and through our concern. So in the long run I think we were able to build up, I hope, that we were able to build up this feeling about Americans not being basically bad but only misguided. I would be delighted if this would be the verdict of history on us at this time. I'm not sure it will be, but that is as good as we could ever expect to get.

M: Did you receive any comments from the White House on your programs and formats?

C: No, because after I was appointed I virtually never saw Lyndon Johnson again. I did see him again—we'd get asked to the White House every once in awhile, only rarely. The problem in responding to this is that it sounds like sour grapes, and I hope it isn't taken in that sense. But I really only had one serious talk with the President after he appointed me and that was when, at my request and ultimately my insistence, I got an appointment with him to say goodbye to him when I was leaving the government. He had a lot of other

things on his mind. He said, "How was it? Was everything all right? Did it turn out the way we talked about it?" He remembered our earlier conversation, and I said, "It was. And thank you very much."

We never, at the Voice, received any instructions from the White House because that isn't the way things work. I would get feelings about what the White House was up to through Leonard Marks, who would go and see the President and sit in on the National Security Council and things like that. Leonard would talk to me about things I needed to know about, and we had I think really quite a good relationship on that basis.

So the answer is no. The White House never interfered, never adopted any kind of surveillance of Voice programs, although we installed a special speaker in the White House so that the President could listen to the programs if he wanted to. I never really had any evidence that—I guess he did. I guess every once in awhile Leonard Marks would say that the President had heard something on one of our English language broadcasts, which I would instantly transmit to the staff at the Voice because it was so good for morale. But no, we had the twentieth anniversary of the Voice of America while I was there, and it was impossible to get any sort of presidential statement about it. We had really hoped to get him to come down to the Voice and make a little speech or walk through the halls. And as I recall, he just absolutely wouldn't come near us. But again, I don't know what the reasons were for that, and I was working through Leonard Marks, who was very much Johnson's man in this, so that maybe Leonard Marks wasn't pressing him hard enough. I don't know.

M: Were there any occasions in which you disagreed in the presentation of something or the policy adopted on something that you wished to put on the program?

C: No, only rarely. You see, the Voice gets its policy guidance from the USIA, and the USIA, using various pieces of cumbersome machinery, because there isn't any way of streamlining it, takes certain attitudinal positions on things. Then you construct commentaries on the Voice within the bounds of these positions and under various criteria that sometimes change and set out. So I don't really think that I ever had any serious disagreements with policies except with some small kind of nit-picking things that I thought were excessively foolish. That's built into any kind of relationship of that kind.

M: Was there any reluctance to accept your resignation in the spring of 1967?

C: No, because I announced it. I told Leonard Marks that I would be going then, and he knew that I wanted to go back to work, and it was all done in a very orderly way. I was afraid that Leonard would go to the White House and say, "Chancellor's leaving next month," or something, and then that this whole thing might start again, that I might be asked to stay another year. So I had all kinds of arguments prepared which I never had to use. So I was allowed to depart gracefully.

M: Would you, on the basis of hindsight, recommend any changes in the administration and direction of the Voice of America?

C: Sure. I think probably in the long run we'd be better off if the Voice were a public corporation unconnected with the government, staffed with people who had no connection with politics—and indeed very few of them have any connection with politics at all. I think there has to be more distance put between the Voice and the government. I think you could represent the United States with more persuasion and no additional cost if the Voice were turned over to and run by a panel of distinguished citizens, for

example—made some sort of public corporation. That would be one major recommendation I would make.

In terms of smaller recommendations, I don't think they have any place in an interview like this because they're a lot of little ones.

M: As a veteran reporter in the past five presidential campaigns and conventions and elections, how would you compare Mr. Johnson to other candidates, and the 1964 convention which nominated him to other presidential conventions?

C: The convention in 1964 was comparable in my experience to the convention in 1956 in San Francisco when the Republicans renominated Dwight Eisenhower. A president in power controls his party's convention, and Johnson controlled this one. I remember being told by somebody in the White House staff that fall that there was a mysterious man named Marvin Watson who was really running the convention. I had not heard of this mysterious Marvin Watson, and I found out a little more about him and did a couple of stories on him which various White House people were saying, "Oh, you're over-emphasizing Marvin Watson's importance," and then we found out exactly how important Marvin Watson was.

But Johnson as a politician, Johnson as a candidate—the question I suppose has to be, "How well would Lyndon Johnson have done if he had run against a man other than Barry Goldwater?" I think he would have won in any case. I don't think the Republicans had anybody that could have beat Lyndon Johnson. But somehow Lyndon Johnson never really seemed to understand or to be able to use well the contemporary machinery which is available to a presidential candidate. Kennedy understood media much better than Johnson did. So I guess I'm qualified not so much as a political observer, but as someone

who is interested in media and its use by politicians to talk about Johnson. I know he knew that he had failings in this, that he wasn't very good at it, and he was constantly trying to overcome it. Various presidential press conference techniques were used, an endless array. They were forever tinkering with the television equipment in the East Wing of the White House, various kinds of glasses were used, barbers were used. All of this is perfectly legitimate. As a matter of fact it's necessary for a president to try to present himself as well as he could. But Johnson, I think, never got the secret. He never could overcome it.

And this may have something to do with his basic personality. I think it does, and I have a way of expressing it, that Lyndon Johnson's troubles with the media and troubles with the press were directly related to the fact that he was not so much a politician as a legislator, as a parliamentarian. His whole life had been involved in legislative situations. Before he became vice president—which in a sense is becoming nothing, so I guess you would have to say before he became president—every action he took in his public life was designed to produce legislation.

If you look at the environment of Capitol Hill, of the House in which he served, of the Senate in which he served, of the Senate which he led, a great deal of that work is what I might call a conspiratorial nature. The decisions on the Hill are made by small groups of men who have brought power to themselves, and get together, close the door, have a drink, and decide what they're going to do. And this is the way any legislative body operates. The House of Commons operates that way. But what it means is that the public's business in a legislative situation, in a parliamentary environment—the public's business is done in private. And Lyndon Johnson was, and I say this with admiration, the

sneakiest of them all. He was just marvelous at accomplishing good things in devious ways.

I think that he could look back with considerable pride on his record in the Congress on the various things they were able to do there, and yet we also have to acknowledge that this shaped an attitude he had toward life, toward how he worked, toward how things were accomplished. And in those days he didn't have press relation problems, because he had mainly a claque of reporters who could be called in and led by the hand—and he was very good at this when he was on the Hill—led by the hand down paths he would direct. And if people wrote badly about him, then he just didn't see them. George Reedy is the man who knows more about this period of Johnson's life than anybody else I know. I would certainly say all of this if George were here, because he and I have discussed it. He knows how I feel.

So you took this man who had been part of a power group on the Hill, who had been able to control the publicity about him, who had been able to do good things because he knew how to be devious; he knew how to dissemble, he knew how to go around all the corners, he knew how to twist all the arms, and you put him in the public spotlight of the presidency where the public's business pretty much has to be conducted in public. I found that Lyndon Johnson was totally unfit—his life had not prepared him—to operate in the presidential spotlight where things have to be done in quite a different way. Lyndon Johnson ran the White House and the country the way he had trained himself to run the Senate. Only the country and the White House aren't the Senate.

Am I getting across to you in this?

And his duplicity, his whole array of techniques involving things done under the table, of heading in one direction while really going in another, I think shows up in, for example, the conduct of the war in Viet Nam. Lyndon Johnson's problem in Viet Nam and in the reaction of this country and other countries to it stemmed partially from the fact that he hid from us a lot of the things that were actually going on.

I think that perhaps in your oral history project you'll be able to determine something I feel intuitively, I know, and that is that during the political campaign of 1964 that President Johnson knew that there were going to have to be some very hard things done in Viet Nam in 1965. I think he overstated his peacefulness in the campaign against Goldwater. Goldwater, of course, helped him a lot. But I think he overstated his peacefulness so that within a year we were bombing North Viet Nam and sending more and more troops there.

Lyndon Johnson, I think, was not so much a man—I mean, one is reminded of the boy who cried wolf. Well, Lyndon Johnson got in trouble because he was forever crying sheep, and he did this in so many different ways. He did this partially in the domestic program, partially in his relations with other people, that the legislator-turned-president did him in in the long run.

I think he would not have been forced into the unhappy decision not to run again if the country had been better prepared, if the country had better understood what he was doing in Viet Nam. And I think that what I've said has some value about his innate deviousness, the life style he had, because the one great disadvantage Lyndon Johnson had in running this country is that the people didn't quite trust him. It's perfectly all right to have a sort of grudging admiration, along with mistrust, for a parliamentary leader who

has got to do a lot of finagling and string pulling in order to get things done. But that measure of that sense of uneasiness and mistrust can kill a president, and it did Lyndon Johnson.

M: Would you attribute this in part to the response the media had to him?

C: Yes. There were problems on both sides. You see, when you talk about the media, television, I think, in terms of his presidency, I think television news was pretty kind to him, because television news, in my judgment, when looking at presidents, tends to be very much of a passive medium. The president makes a speech, we cover it. The president has a news conference, we cover it. The president signs some legislation, we cover it. And there is, I'm sorry to say, not yet on television, the room for the kind of commentary you get in newspapers and the kind of critical judgments you can make in magazines. So I think television was not unkind to Johnson in that it transmitted to the country Johnson—for good or for bad, but it was Johnson.

In terms of sort of the liberal press that turned against him, I think there was a lot of bias and prejudice against him. And I think that he fed a lot of these prejudices about himself through some of his actions, through some of his mannerisms.

I don't think really anybody ever understood Lyndon Johnson. Because I got drafted we could not do a film that I had wanted to do. The product that NBC turned out was sort of a bland sixty-minute commercial for the Ranch. I don't think it was very good. But what I wanted to do was to try to show Lyndon Johnson the way I saw him, and I don't think many people saw him this way.

I saw him as an aristocrat. Now, hold on. I saw him as an absolute aristocrat in the term that a lot of Americans don't quite understand. I began thinking about this when

I first went to Johnson City and when we went to Lake Johnson, when we did all of these things. I used to have it around here somewhere, and I don't suppose I have it now, but a little book I put together with a lot of notes on this thing. But his family went back very far in that part of the world. His grandfather, I think, had been a university president; his father was a man of substance. You don't have to have money to be of substance, and you don't have to have money to be an aristocrat. And you don't even have to have any manners to be an aristocrat. And I think that Lyndon Johnson was very aristocratic in the sense of the kind of county aristocracy you see in Britain or in France. If Lyndon Johnson had been the Barón Johnson from the Limoges, he would still have had sort of the barnyard manners and the sort of terrible self-assurance, the sort of capacity of disdain that he had for so many things. His attitude toward women and drink and food would be very much the same.

If you think about Lyndon Johnson in these terms, I think you get a kind of different Lyndon Johnson. You don't get just the hayseed boy who came up from the farm. He, incidentally, loved that image. You don't get the kind of hayseed boy come up from the farm and worked his way up from the log cabin to be president. I think Johnson made a mistake in fostering that one. You get a very involved and complicated personality with strong blood lines and strong prejudices. I think if they'd taken this other tack about him, or if he had had the insight into himself, and people rarely have insight into themselves, I think the country might have felt quite differently about Lyndon Johnson, the aristocrat, than they did about Lyndon Johnson, the hayseed. I've talked to Bill Moyers about this and a number of other people, and they all kind of agreed, "Yes, that was a pretty interesting way of looking at him."

But I cite this because very few people were given an opportunity by Johnson to look at him. I mean, he overwhelmed the press. He was guilty of very serious overkill in his relations with reporters. I remember having had sessions with him myself when I'd ask to see him, and I'd get a call to go in, and I'd go in alone, and we'd sit in that little room next to his office, and I would want to ask one or two questions that I felt needed to be answered. He would do that, but at the same he would talk for an hour and forty-five minutes without stopping. Jack Valenti used to say that the President had some kind of extra gland. Do you remember that? Well, I know what the extra glands are. The extra glands allow Lyndon Johnson to eat a five-course meal without ever stopping talking. I don't think that Johnson gave individual reporters anything but this sort of—you felt that you were engulfed in a tidal wave. There were only a few, I think, who really tried to get at the serious Johnson. I think Tom Wicker tried, and Max Frankel tried, and I know that Hugh Sidey tried. Probably Hugh Sidey had a better fix on Lyndon Johnson than any other reporter I know in Washington.

So you ask about the relations with the media. There were biases and prejudices in the media against Johnson, but Johnson hurt himself a great deal in some of his relations with the media. I can't really cite you a lot of anecdotal material on that, but I know it to be true.

M: Do you think the press and the media reflected his growing unpopularity, or influenced it?

C: Again, let's separate them. The big national magazines, let's say ***Time*** and ***Newsweek***, were not all that hard on him. In fact ***Time*** Magazine was pretty positive on the war for quite a long time. Television, as I say, is passive in its judgment of a presidency so that I

don't think that television prejudiced the country against him. The liberal magazines and some of the liberal newspapers that were against him were few in number, and I don't think had a mass influence. So I guess in working that answer out, it would have to be that Johnson was the carrier of his own unpopularity, I think.

M: I think you may have sort of indicated through anecdotes of your own experience with what is called the credibility gap. Did this have a great bearing, this phrase which came to mean either misdirection or misunderstanding by the public and by the media, by the news?

C: Again, you see, we go back to the business of Johnson, the manipulator. I think the first turning by the media—if you can lump them all together—the first turning away from Johnson, the first real moment of suspicion probably came during the Dominican intervention. I think that Johnson felt very ill-used by the press at that time because the press didn't accept his version of the events. And I don't think history will accept his version of the events, either. I think he felt very wounded by that. I have a lot of reason to believe that, that he felt wounded and frustrated by the press. He felt that he couldn't handle the press, because Lyndon Johnson liked to handle things. He liked to run things. He was no fun in a boat unless he was at the wheel. So he felt that. And the press at the same time, I think there was this sort of reciprocal feeling, that they turned away from him a little bit, because, in a sense, in very plain language, some of them felt they had caught him.

Then the war in Viet Nam came along, and at that time Johnson's attitude toward the press was either smothering them to death with kindness and accessibility or changing press secretaries and trying other techniques, always trying to get control of something

that is very uncontrollable. Every president has to go through this. Nixon has to go through it. Jack Kennedy, I remember, had his problems, cancelled subscriptions to newspapers and did other foolish things. Johnson had more, I believe, of an innate unconscious fundamental belief that the media could be controlled than probably Kennedy did or any other recent president, and felt that he was the best man to control them. And so this resulted in his most trusted aide being given the most difficult job in the White House: Bill Moyers as press secretary. Bill Moyers was pretty good because he's a gifted man. But it wasn't easy for Bill Moyers to be press secretary to Johnson. And in those days we had reason to believe that Johnson was eavesdropping on the daily briefings.

Tape 2 of 2

M: Mr. Chancellor, while changing the tape, we got to discussing your theory on the aristocratic nature sort of behind Lyndon Johnson, and you started to continue on that, and I'd like to just hear what your ideas are.

C: This is really rambling and probably doesn't mean very much, but I was just now thinking that when Jack Kennedy's grandfather Honey Fitz was mayor of Boston—wasn't he?—Johnson's grandfather had been president of Baylor. And so if you wanted to talk blood lines—and I don't believe that Americans really should; we're not the kind of people who do because we've had too many immigrants, but if you just wanted to talk about blood lines despite that, you could make an argument that the Johnson family blood lines were as good or better than the Kennedy family blood lines—and leaving aside Lady Bird and Jackie Bouvier. So I think that the President might have been better understood by the country if his aristocratic arrogance had been explained in those terms.

He sent out all kinds of wrong signals to the people. He sent out a whole series of mystifying signals. This was part of my fascination with his personality. He would send our liberal-conservative signals at the same time. He would send out internationalist-isolationist signals at the same time. He was, I think, bedeviled by the fact that he sent out so many contradictory signals in the same messages. He could get up and make a speech at Howard University, which Dick Goodwin wrote for him, on the Negro family and what we would to do about the Negroes, which was one of the most inspiring speeches I have ever heard in my life. It really, I think, was his finest moment as president, that speech. And yet what did you see when the speech was being made? You saw somebody with that long face and the regional accent and that sort of high collar white shirt and that sort of luminescent suit he used to wear, that all added up to a visual impression of a man who couldn't possibly be saying anything good about blacks. Yet he was saying these majestic things! That's just one example of many in which Johnson sent up contradictory signals to the society.

The role of the press in that, again is, I think, rather passive. I don't see that the press was doing him in, in that sense, because I think he was doing himself in. You can say this, you can take this attitude about Johnson with genuine sorrow for the man. I don't really know how he could have overcome the contradictory signal syndrome, but I do know that he had it.

M: You had mentioned Bill Mbyers as one of the press secretaries, and of course this is the go-between between the President and the press and the media. Would you give me your opinion or analysis of the effectiveness of his press secretaries, which would include Mr. Moyers, George Reedy, George Christian and their service to him?

C: George Reedy, after a lifetime of service with Lyndon Johnson, and probably a more thoughtful attitude toward Johnson than anybody else around him at that time, was made the victim of Johnson's inability to control the press. Reedy knew that you couldn't control the press, but it was pretty hard to get the President to understand that. Reedy did not tell me that, but I'm quite sure that that's what happened.

George Reedy was an extremely well-read connoisseur of various things in life. George Reedy, in some ways, is right out of central casting for a presidential press secretary, with the pipe and the big shock of white hair and the slow mode of speech. But Reedy had helped Johnson tremendously over the years, and when Johnson began to become so terribly frustrated by his inability to control the press, he decided that a new press secretary would fix that. I don't think a new press secretary would have fixed that, and I was sorry to see George go because I thought George was about as good as Lyndon Johnson deserved. That sounds like I'm demeaning George Reedy; I'm *not*. I think he was very good.

Let's see, who came after Reedy? Was it Moyers? So then Moyers came in, and Moyers, being quite a different breed of cat, struggled with the same problem and was in some ways, I think, more successful with it because he was new. But, again, the same basic situation had not altered, and that was of a president sitting in the Oval Office seething with frustration and anger about the reporters in the West Wing lobby. Moyers was a very talented go-between, but if you couldn't fix the basic situation, you couldn't be a very effective press secretary.

So when Bill Moyers left, then Johnson did, I think, a very smart thing, which I didn't think was smart at the time. He got what you might in very blunt language call a

kind of a courthouse press agent from Texas named George Christian. And George Christian pretty much just shut his mouth and did as little as he could and became a kind of technician rather than a spokesman, and changed the job around, and I think performed brilliantly. Against all expectations and all odds, I think that George Christian probably was the most successful press secretary of the three. Why? Because George Christian wasn't a press secretary! He wasn't what Reedy could have been. He wasn't what Moyers tried to be. He must have understood in some basic way—and I've never talked to George about this—but he must have sensed in some very fundamental way that Lyndon Johnson was inexplicable. So the best thing to do was to batten down the hatches, let out as little as possible, and let Johnson go on about the business of the presidency. And maybe the President understood this. I think they got along quite well. So during a very difficult period for Johnson, I think he was ably served by a man named George Christian, who understood that you couldn't serve him in the classic way, in the way that presidents would like to have spokesmen serve them, the way Jim Hagerty served Eisenhower, for example; the way Pierre Salinger served Kennedy;pas a link, as somebody to explain and to persuade and to help make the President more public and more understandable. And George Christian, with an inexplicable president, simply served as a very efficient and I think sometimes charming conduit of limited information about the presidency, and that was all.

M: There was quite a flap over Mr. Moyers leave-taking of the President. Did you ever discuss this with either the President or Mr. Moyers?

C: I never discussed it with the President, and I've only discussed it in general terms with Bill Moyers. I have talked to other people in the White House, and as I recall there was a

great deal of the air of a lovers' quarrel about that time between these two men. The President was saying some very hard things about Bill Moyers, about Bill having deserted him. Then I have been told that there was a great moment of reconciliation when they made up and spent several hours together, just the two of them.

Johnson didn't like people to leave him. And Johnson was also fully aware of the value Moyers had in making the Johnson Administration look good. I think Moyers was quite an asset to that administration. So yes, I think they probably did have a tough time. I've heard some of the public stories that Johnson helped Bill get other jobs and offers and things like that. I think probably there were harder things that I wasn't aware of and that we weren't aware of at the time. That's speculation.

While I'm on that subject, it is true that Lyndon Johnson could be and has been on many occasions extraordinarily helpful to young men leaving the White House. I can think of one or two instances, and if you poke around you can probably find more, when he got jobs for people, when he really went to bat for them and really helped them the way a president can help people get good jobs that will lead them to better things in their lives. So it ought not to be recorded that Lyndon Johnson was petty about people leaving him, because he wasn't. I thought he was really rather good.

One way I know about this is that I talked to somebody in the White House—I can't remember who it was now, it may have been Moyers, I don't think it was—when I was preparing my resignation. You remember I said that I was afraid that there might be a request to stay on for another year since things were going pretty well. I was told that the way to do it, if I got called into the White House, was to go in and ask the President for help in setting my career back on its course; that a fatal way to do it would be to go in

and say, "Mr. President, I want to resign because I want to make some money, and I'm going to be leaving, and thank you very much, sir." Then he would try to make you stay. But if you went in and said, "Mr. President, I need your advice and your help. My life has now reached the point where I have to have an older man to guide me," then he'd move heaven and earth for you. I think this facet of his personality is underreported, because I think he has taken a lot of time to help some of those younger fellows get on, and they ought to be grateful to him.

M: Did you think that Mr. Moyers did any disservice in his sort of conveying the presidency of Mr. Johnson?

C: No, I don't think so. I was possibly looking at it the wrong way because I was worried then about Johnson's image internationally. But no, I have no complaints from my point of view about what Bill did as press secretary.

M: I'd like to ask you a couple of questions relating to getting the story at the White House. Was Mr. Johnson ever behind a call to lay off or get on to a story?

C: Would you say that again?

M: Was Mr. Johnson ever behind a call or did he make a call regarding a story, to get on it or get off of it?

C: You mean the way Jack Kennedy tried to get Dave Halberstam transferred from Saigon? I don't think there was anything quite that crude. I'm just searching my mind. I can't remember a specific story being killed by a newspaper or by any other medium because of the White House. I think Johnson would call people and talk to them. I think he used Frank Stanton a certain amount at CBS for that. I'm sure that he talked to Bob Kintner at NBC on various public relations matters. But when you got down to the reporting level,

while I was covering the White House nobody ever told me that I couldn't say anything, and nobody ever suggested to me that I say it in a different way. I would remember that, and that never happened to me. And you know, when a reporter gets a story changed or a story which he writes and doesn't get in the paper because it's critical of the president, word of that gets around the press corps very quickly, *very* quickly. And I can't remember—mind you, I was a White House correspondent for only about six months, and then I was lost—but I can't remember, and many of these people are friends of mine going back for many years, I can't remember anybody ever saying that a presidential call had stopped a story, although it might have happened. But it's damned difficult to do, as Jack Kennedy found out. Most organizations won't do it.

I think where Johnson probably was effective was in maybe shaping some longer-range editorial policies. One example is, as I said earlier, ***Time*** Magazine was fairly kind to him about the war in Viet Nam for a long time, and it may have been that he had talks with the various people at Time Inc. to do that.

There is a tendency, I think, for large organizations to put people covering the White House who will get along well with the president. There are a lot of reasons for that. I think most organizations will not send to the White House anybody who is just fiercely critical of the president and who writes about him all the time. Now this sometimes happens after a man has been sent to the White House, but I think presidents get pretty good treatment from most large organizations, and I'm sure this is true at NBC, that if I'd been feuding with the President all along steadily, that NBC would have felt very uncomfortable about me. It didn't happen, and it hasn't happened with any of the network correspondents I can recall, although you might talk to Dan Rather at CBS. I'm

a great admirer of Dan Rather, and I think Dan has taken some fairly hard stands, but I would bet a hundred dollars that CBS has never spoken to him about that.

M: Did you ever get any sort of kickback on what you reported about Mr. Johnson from either him or his staff?

C: Yes, I remember Reedy asking for copies of some of the things I did which were critical of the President, but other than that, I was delighted that they were paying that much attention. The White House staff, and Johnson himself, were very media-oriented. In kind of using the terminology that wasn't around then, Lyndon Johnson was what they now call a media freak. He had the ticker tapes in his office. Frank Stanton used to give to people in the administration these little arrays of three television sets and a box. You pressed various buttons on the box and you could get the sound coming from any one of the three networks. They were always sort of switched on in the White House to media. They were hooked in far more than, I think, the Kennedy people had been and far more than the Nixon people are now. Just everybody in the White House then would be watching newscasts and reading newspapers and magazines and talking to reporters. In some ways it was a glorious time to be a reporter there because they did follow very carefully what you did. Then, sure, sometimes when you'd say various things in conversation—Moyers was always good at this—talking to you about what you had said, trying to change your mind in an honest and aboveboard, perfectly ethical way. Yes, I think they were probably pretty good at that, very good at that, but ethical.

M: Did this specifically ever happen to you?

C: Yes, it happened to me a lot, but it didn't happen very much with the President. What the President would do is that he would criticize—and this was a ghastly failing of his—he

would criticize reporters in the presence of other reporters, but not to their face. And he would imitate reporters to other reporters, but not to their face. And of course word gets right back to the man being criticized.

One thing Lyndon Johnson did that I always thought was marvelously colorful was that he would mispronounce people's names deliberately. I've seen him do that, and I've seen him do it *to* people, to put them off their guard. I've seen him do it to government people. Yes, he has imitated various commentators on television to me critically. He would tell you—columnists like Joe Alsop would come and call on him, and he'd do sort of imitations of Alsop and what Alsop had said to him to people like me. And then we'd go and tell somebody else, and it would get back to Alsop. This was one thing he did which showed that he paid very great attention. So he may, for all I know, have been imitating me to other people. But his way was not to criticize you personally as much as to criticize you to your peers. And then I guess he assumed that word would get back. He could be very cold and very distant and very aloof to people who had written things that he didn't like. Doug Kiker of the ***Herald Tribune*** had that treatment for awhile. I mean, he'd just sort of look right through you. Sometimes he would sort of argue with you directly.

I remember during the Dominican Republic crisis we had taken a walk around the lawn. And standing right in front of the diplomatic entrance he had stopped, we were pressing him, and I was pressing him particularly for evidence that we'd sent the marines in there because the place was--they kept coming out with lists of eighty-nine, or ninety, or ninety-two communists. And I kept saying, "Mr. President, who are they, and how do you know?" I guess I asked him just once too many because he stopped and he turned on

me and he jabbed his finger in my chest and he said, "You just want to put your country on trial. You don't want to cover the news, you just want to hurt the country." You know, went into a rage! So yes, you did get feedback from various things on a lot of different levels. But again, I think, ethically. I think the President has a right to argue with reporters.

M: In your going and seeing him personally and asking him questions or pursuing some story you were on, did you ever find out afterwards or feel that he was attempting to float any trial balloons with you?

C: Oh, yes, all kinds. I mean, the air was just dense with trial balloons. I can't remember any specifically, but he used talks with reporters in a couple of different ways. The lowest priority he would have would be answering your specific questions. The next higher priority would be to persuade you about the value of certain specific programs he was undertaking, and to persuade you of the value of his whole administration—I mean, how good it was and the various things it was doing.

Then I suppose the highest priority of all with him was to let you know how good he was and how hard he was working himself. We all knew that. We all knew precisely how hard he worked; he worked terribly hard. But he always seemed to be unsure that he was getting that point across. So we would get these extraordinary little domestic dramas about Walt Rostow calling him at three o'clock in the morning, and all about how he prayed and slept, and what Lady Bird said, and I thought a little excessively intimate portraits of life in the Mansion. Yes, there were trial balloons in that; there were attacks on other reporters in that; there were statements of shocking candor about other political figures in the world, about Mike Pearson, who was then the prime minister of Canada,

who, I remember, angered the President greatly by Pearson's attitudes toward the war in Viet Nam. It was wide-screen, full color theater whenever you were in there with him. Everything was going on!

M: Do you recall any specific trial balloons as such that—?

C: Well, one I've already mentioned, and that was that he just said that he didn't want anybody going around Europe with his shirt out trying to persuade the Europeans to take multinational forces. In a sense, that was a sort of an announcement. It wasn't a trial balloon. But it was a trial balloon in the way that the press is traditionally used because some of us said it, and some others wrote it, and it got circulated around to the people who ought to know about it. And because there was no outcry from the Europeans and there was no outcry from anybody in this country, then having floated it he was able to go ahead and do it. So yes, there was a lot of that, a lot of that. Little tips about what he was going to do and what he was thinking.

M: Were you very much dependent upon inside sources and leaks to get your story?

C: To a degree. I think the White House was relatively open. Johnson tried to control this by keeping his men from going to lunch, that sort of thing. But yes, I got various tips when I was covering the White House from people. I got a tip on a bombing pause in Viet Nam that was of considerable value, which we were able to get on the air before anybody else. And you could see Moyers or you could see Valenti—you could sometimes see Califano—and you could occasionally see Bundy, although Bundy not much. Then Rostow came in. I say not much about Mac Bundy, because he was more close-mouthed than anybody else. I think Rostow was accessible. When I came back to work here, having been in the government, I began taking an interest again in the White

House, although it wasn't specifically my job. I found that I could call Walt Rostow and get the official line at the time, and he would call me back—busy man.

M: These were directed tips or leaks?

C: No. I'm not talking about tips or leaks, really. I'm talking now about the whole area of accessibility of officials in the White House. Really thinking back, aside from the tip I got on the bombing pause, I think was the only noteworthy tip, really newsworthy tip, that I got. What you got otherwise were sort of indications of how things might go, dates of when messages would be sent to the Hill so that you could sort of prepare yourself, and a lot of sort of after-the-fact explanation which went on in the Johnson Administration right up to the last day; after-the-fact explanations of why we were bombing and what the kill ratio meant in Viet Nam and all those things.

But I don't want to give you the impression that there were people lurking around in the West Lobby giving out news tips, because it didn't work that way, although the President himself occasionally would say things. That's why George Reedy and other press secretaries always like to sit in on an interview when the President is talking to a reporter, because you can't ever tell what a President is likely to say. And with Lyndon Johnson, you sort of doubled that, in fact.

M: How did you happen to get this one tip that you're talking about on the bombing pause?

C: I got it from a friend of mine named—I'll never forget what's his name! Isn't that awful? I know him very well, I just haven't seen him in a couple of years. Mac Kilduff. Mac Kilduff told me and he told Bill Lawrence of ABC at the same time. We both hotfooted it out and put it on the air. It turned out to be true. It was announced the next day. Now, why did Kilduff do that? I don't know. I don't think he was under any particular orders

to do it. I think he did it because he knew it couldn't hurt anything, that the enemy would know that we were going to stop in a few hours, and that it wouldn't endanger any security for anybody or anything. And sometimes if people in the press office know you and like you, they'll give you a little help like that once in awhile when it's not critical.

M: Did Mr. Johnson ever play favorites with the newsmen?

C: Uh huh. Oh, yes. If you wrote about him consistently in a praiseworthy manner, then all kinds of things would happen to you. Bill White, the syndicated columnist, who has been a fan of Johnson's for years and a personal pal, was forever going on weekends. I mean, they were just close personally, the Whites and the Johnsons. Yes, I can think of various other people. There was a British reporter, Max Freedman(?), who was in the syndicated column business, and I can't remember now where he is now. He was very ill, I know, and I don't know where he is today--Max. But Max Freedman could get Johnson to come out to his house. I think Max's column was in trouble at one point, and he had some publishers in, and he got the President to come over to his house for dinner. And Max Freedman was a slavish admirer of Lyndon Johnson's. You see, this goes back to what I was telling you earlier about his Senate days. And, again, that was when Bill White was in the Senate. It got so bad with Bill White that Johnson himself once remarked to me that he thought Bill White was a better reporter when he was covering the Senate than as a columnist.

M: Did this cause any disservice to the newsman or TV commentator among his peers?

C: It caused poor Max Freedman, who was such a nice man—he really is—it caused him to be called Lord Toady of Toady Hall. Yes, sure, scorned! Scorned!

M: Did this ever have any effect on a person's position as a White House reporter or commentator by, say, his publishers or producers?

C: I suppose there's a sort of balance required of people who cover the White House for responsible organizations, that you are not unnecessarily critical about the president, and that you are not unnecessarily praising—or however you say that in English—that you don't praise him too much. Balance is the most desirable attitude to have, and I think those people have it. A syndicated columnist can get away a little bit with taking more extreme attitudes. But reporters working for organizations that serve, as NBC serves, as the AP and the UP serve, other organizations—I work for NBC news but that means that we in a sense are servicing a couple of hundred stations around the country—radio—and about a hundred and fifty television stations. They go into all kinds of different markets, and are seen by people with all kinds of views. And just as the AP and the UP try to be as balanced and judicial in their judgments as they can be, so must we.

M: I have just a very few rather general questions to conclude with. Were you very much surprised by Mr. Johnson's withdrawal on March 31, 1968, and the military limitations he placed on the war simultaneously?

C: I was stunned, absolutely stunned.

M: Did you think these two decisions were linked?

C: The scaling down of Viet Nam and his resignation? Yes, I thought they were all part of one package.

M: Did you think they were voluntary on his part or determined by the circumstances?

C: I think they were determined by the circumstances. I don't think Lyndon Johnson gave up power at all easily. I think that he was driven to it by circumstances and, to a degree, by his own mistakes.

M: Do you think he realized that?

C: Yes, I think he did in the end. I thought he was sort of noble at the end. But I think that he realized that—during his administration, is the gentlest way to put it—the country had gotten itself into a terrible mess and there was only one way out, and that was for him to get out, and to, as he said in that famous statement, "to devote himself purely to getting us out of Viet Nam." And we're still trying to do that. But yes, that was a moment in our history of extraordinary drama, because he could have gone the other way and tried to ride out the election and put on wage and price controls, increased the price of gold, done a lot of other really monumental things, and sent a couple more million people to Viet Nam. That was an option open to him right to the end.

M: What or whom do you think was most influential in these two decisions?

C: Clifford, I think. I've heard various stories. I've heard stories that his economic advisers played a very significant role in this. But I would think in terms of advocacy, I would say that Clark Clifford probably had more to do with it than anybody else.

M: Do you think he could have won the renomination and been elected?

C: No, I don't think so, and I think he knew that. I think he could have been renominated. I don't think there would have been a problem there. But I think he would have lost the election.

M: Did you ever have the feeling that he might be available for draft in the 1968 convention after his statement?

C: Yes. I felt that the convention had been organized in such a way, quite deliberately organized in an unusual way, so that Johnson could have accepted a draft if the political circumstances at the time had made it possible. I believe this very strongly, that the handling of the convention generally—I believed this at the time, incidentally, more than I believe it now—but the way that Mayor Daley set up the convention, they way they limited television coverage, the way they were setting up the hall—the whole thing looked to me, and I'm not alone in this, there are other people who were closer to the political apparatus than I am who heard this bell ringing 'way off in their minds and were quite aware of it. I didn't think it up. It was first pointed out to me by a member of the Democratic National Committee, that this might in fact be what Johnson was planning. If you adopted that theory, then it made what was going on in Chicago more understandable. So I believed that then.

Now, looking back on it, I'm not sure that I do believe it. But you'll recall that Johnson was trying to arrange a summit conference with the Russians to have taken place at about the time of the Republican national convention, which would have been just marvelous theater and characteristic of him. There were a number of things that came together at about that time that would make you wonder if he didn't hold this one option available. I don't think we'll ever know that. I think that he may also come back to politics. It wouldn't surprise me at all to see him come back to the Senate.

M: Did you feel that Mr. Johnson was much in control of the 1968 convention?

C: Yes, I think he was, very much. Through John Fretwell. . .Treadwell [Criswell?]; I'm not very good on names this morning—yes. We have pretty good information that there was somebody at the other end of the telephone on the platform who was watching very

closely. If it wasn't the President himself, I think it was somebody close to him. It may have been Marvin Watson, I just don't know. But yes, I think Johnson was very much aware of what was going on, or somebody was; somebody was. And I can't think of anybody else with enough power to have replaced Johnson as the presence at the other end of that telephone.

N: Why do you say that?

C: Because people were getting orders on that telephone. And who else but somebody close to the President could be giving the orders?

M: What orders are you—?

C: Oh, orders about controlling the debate, orders about debate on planks, orders about procedures in the convention, adjournment, all of that. Oh, yes.

Also, there was a telephone in the Illinois delegation. The way I understand the link-up was that Dick Daley had a telephone to the platform and that somebody on the platform was talking to somebody else somewhere else, and that this was the command and control arrangement at the convention. I'd have to do some research to do anything on this, but there were several instances when that phone became important to change decisions that had apparently already been made by those in the hall.

M: Did Mr. Johnson ever discuss with you the course of the Viet Nam war?

C: Oh, yes, lots. There were no secrets there. I just got the line about our responsibilities, the general publicly-accepted line which he would give you in private. Sort of the Rostow line, I think you would call it.

M: Did you ever try to counter this with your position?

C: I advocated a number of things in Viet Nam that I thought should have been done. It was not my business to do so, but I was fortunate enough with Leonard Marks to be brought by him into discussions not only of what ought we to be saying about the war, but what ought we to be doing about the war. There were a few of us at the USIA who put together various papers and made various arguments to Leonard Marks, and that's the last I saw of them. I don't know what he did with them, and it was impolitic to ask him what he did with them. But yes, I wrote him a number of papers on bombing policy and all kinds of things.

M: Did you see a definite change in Mr. Johnson's direction of the war from seeking a military solution to more or less settling for a politically negotiated settlement?

C: No. The only change came, it seems to me, and I can't remember the precise date, but it would have been after the first Tet offensive when Westmoreland asked for a couple of hundred thousand more men. According to all the published reports I've read and some of the private conversations I've had with people, that was the turning point. And Johnson had to say "no further." It's my belief that he did that, having been convinced by abstract evidence that the country would have to go on a genuine wartime footing with, as I say, wage and price controls, perhaps an alteration in the price of gold, the whole change in our economics nationally, if we were going to supply those two hundred thousand men or the three or four hundred thousand men. I think Johnson finally realized he'd come to the end of the particular road, and he just couldn't follow it any longer.

Now, whether this was connected with a growing mistrust of the generals, I don't know. It's plausible to speculate about that, that the generals had been coming to him and saying, "only a few more months and only a few more men," and he finally got to the

point where he said, "I just can't go down that road with you any longer." I think that's a plausible assumption. But I have no personal knowledge of that.

M: Do you think there was a genuine lack of understanding of Viet Nam on the part of the public, or was this really sort of a growing disapproval of our commitment or our conduct there?

C: You'll remember that I said to you that Lyndon Johnson didn't cry "wolf," he cried "sheep." We used the term "salami tactics" to describe what the Communists do in Berlin. But Lyndon Johnson could cut the salami thinner and finer than anybody else I've ever seen in terms of public relations. The buildup in Viet Nam and the commitment in Viet Nam that the United States made under his direction was done so gradually and with such, in one sense, consummate skill at getting us committed to a very huge enterprise, but not really telling us that we were committed to a very huge enterprise—this was done, if you want to call that skillfully, I think you could. I think this was a case of manipulation of public opinion. It was a case of selective control of what the public ought to know about. I think one part of his mind told him that he could do Viet Nam sort of privately without introducing into the national consciousness a sense of exactly what was going on there. Then when the country suddenly just found out what was going on there—not that it hadn't been reported, but it hadn't been channeled or funneled to the country through the presidency—when the country then finally realized what had happened, I think there was some sort of unconscious reaction in this country. Whether he sensed that or not I don't know, but I sensed it, that suddenly people began to wake up to the fact that we were in a major war.

M: How much impact do you think the daily very graphic coverage of the war by television—and for a period of almost four years which came almost simultaneously with our dinner time—how much impact do you think it had on public opinion?

C: I've thought about this a great deal, and I've come to the conclusion that television is an amplifier of prejudices, that the image of what has been called the living-room war or the first visual war. The images of the burning of a Vietnamese village, or the image of B-52 bombers hitting a jungle hillside make the hawks hawkier and the doves dovier. I don't think that television does anything but accelerate attitudes and forces for social change. I don't think it originates it. I think that the cumulative effect of the images of Viet Nam have, and are continuing to have, is causing of hardening of attitudes on both sides. This may not be the popular view of television, but I think it, as I say, makes hawks more militant and doves more peacelike.

I think that if you look at the current public opinion polls about Viet Nam, you'll see some statistical evidence for this—the growing numbers of people who either want to get out without qualification, just cut and run, and the other people who would like to go in there and win it, no matter what, and get out. There is this inevitable polarization of opinion, and I think that television accelerates that and amplifies that. I think that that is at least a partial answer to what has happened in terms of Viet Nam and television.

I do know that Johnson and the people in the White House worried a great deal about the effects of television, and I think they may have misjudged the effects. They worried tremendously when the CBS correspondent named Morley Safer described the burning of a village in Viet Nam. There was a big flap about that, and it was darkly said by the President that Morley Safer was, after all, a Canadian.

M: I have really only one last question more or less in the way of a summation. It's as broad and as general as you can get. How do you think that history will rate and how do you personally rate Mr. Johnson as a president, and perhaps even if you back up, as a senator or vice president, majority leader in the Senate?

C: I think he was a good congressman, a first-rate senator, a brilliant majority leader, an unusual vice president, and I'm afraid not a very successful president. .

M: Do you see that as the verdict of history?

C: Everybody always asks me that, and I don't know how to answer it. All I can see, as I think about the verdict of history on Lyndon Johnson, the gentlest that history can be with him, I think, would be to say that he was a good man brought down by the times; that he was an anachronism, that he tried to run one kind of a country and one kind of a presidency, but the country and the presidency were of a different time. I can see that there is a sort of classical Grecian tragedy about Lyndon Johnson being a man of great strength and guile and wit, used in the old sense of the word, of great energy, brought down by one single enormous classical flaw, which was the war.

On the other hand, history may just say that the United States during the period following the assassination of President Kennedy until the election of President Nixon was ruled by a mediocre president. I don't know, it could be that. It could be that. I think it's far more complicated than that. And to make a historical judgment we have to draw back from the times we've just lived through, and that's very difficult for me.

You could make a case, I suppose, that Lyndon Johnson brought forth in his presidency domestic legislation that began to end the Puritan ethic in the United States; that it was his effort, based on what I like to call the Pauline aspect of his presidency.

That needs to be explained. I think Lyndon Johnson had a Pauline presidency—this is a papal analogy—because we had John XXIII and when we had hopes for Paul—I'm not a Catholic—but we had hopes that the Roman Catholic Church would redesign itself. Paul could only have done that because John XXIII had been pope. And Johnson in some degree could have done only what he did because Jack Kennedy had been president. History may say that following the death of Jack Kennedy that the United States under Johnson first began to acknowledge its responsibilities to the people who could not themselves make it in the American society. If that's the judgment of history, then I think he can lie safely and happily in his grave. It may be that history will decide that. As of the moment, we don't know if that's what it's going to be or not. We don't know if all this legislation is going to work. We don't know if the Republicans are going to dismantle it. We don't really know if the American people are ready to end the Puritan ethic. And so I haven't answered your question.

M: I think you have, very well.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I