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ACCESSION NUMBER 85-16

INTERVIEW I

DATE: October 2, 1981

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES E. CHUDARS

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Chudars' office, Westport, Connecticut

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start off briefly with your background and how you came to Sikorsky.

C: I got my flight training in the army air corps, in Texas. I graduated from Brooks Field in San Antone. That was 1943. Then I flew combat in B-25s in Italy and France. I flew sixty-five combat missions there before going home. I received eight air medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart while I was there. In the States, I was placed in the training command, again in Texas. I was sent to Brooks Field to train cadets in B-25s.

A number of us didn't particularly care to get in the cadet training program. We saw this option one day to sign into helicopters, although we didn't know much about it. You had to sign for another tour overseas and, if you wished, for more combat. But we preferred that to staying in training command.

G: Had you ever flown in a helicopter before?

C: No. These were brand new. There was very little helicopter flying at that point. They had training classes, but there weren't any units. There were some R-4s that were sent out to China. They did some things, but they weren't too effective because of the performance. And the R-6s didn't perform well in the mountains.

When we got through helicopter school--and this was the first class at Wichita Falls, Texas--I was sent on a couple of projects with the Forestry Service and the air mail with the postal departments. We set up the Los Angeles air mail and we set up the Chicago air mail in helicopters. After that, I got out of the service and I flew for Skyways in Boston, where we had the first scheduled passenger service from the top of a parking garage downtown in Boston, across the bay to Logan Airport. It was a five-minute trip. But it didn't pay too well, and they went broke. After that, I came to Sikorsky as a test pilot, and one of the first jobs I had was to go to Texas to fly Mr. Johnson around.

G: You were discussing before we turned on the tape the state of commercial helicopter aviation in 1948.

C: Yes. It hadn't gotten too far. The Bell aircraft was licensed--in fact, although they hadn't been around as long as the Sikorsky in the military, they were licensed first commercially. It seemed after the war they had the GI Bill for everyone coming out, and a lot of people took flying lessons. Getting into the helicopter, they would get trained and given their license, but they had very little experience and they were wrapping up airplanes left and right. The insurance got so high that it was difficult to stay in the business, so a lot of it got into crop dusting and that type of thing. United Airlines was looking at it. We did a number of commercial things, although Sikorsky didn't remain in any commercial programs. They wanted their customers to take it and they'd rather sell them the airplane and let them develop the work. Of course, we just continued making other aircraft and testing them. But for jobs where apparently they couldn't get aircraft and pilots, they went to the manufacturer. I'm not aware of anyone at that time who would have been available for that other than a manufacturer.

G: Do you recall the origin of LBJ's approaching Sikorsky about [a helicopter]?

C: No, I don't. I, of course, wasn't on a manager level. I was strictly a test pilot. One day the boss said, "Say, we need someone to go to Texas." There were four of us pilots working there at the time, and no one was anxious about going down to Texas. I said "Well, what is it for?" Congressman Johnson was going for senator. I said I didn't mind going down. So that's the way it started. But I'd never heard of Johnson before that. Of course, we're looking in retrospect now. We're not looking at Johnson, the President, we're looking at Johnson as a member of the House of Representatives. So I think the viewpoint was probably different than it is now.

G: Did you have contact with anyone in the Johnson campaign organization before you got to Texas?

C: No, never. No.

G: How'd you get the helicopter to Texas?

C: Oh, I was told by our management.

G: Well, did you fly it down there?

C: Oh, yes.

G: Did you?

C: Oh, yes. In fact, I dug out my old log book, and the dates coincide completely with your chronology.

G: Good.

C: It starts right in here: Sikorsky to Harrisburg, Harrisburg to Knoxville [?], all the way down to Dallas, and that's the beginning of the Johnson campaign right there. The rest of that is cross-country. Then the rest of it says nine cities in the Johnson campaign, seven, nine, eight, eight, all the way down the number of cities we [visited]. Then it goes up to here where we go into Dallas. We stayed in Dallas a few days and then flew back to Sikorsky. There was just over one hundred hours in one month in that airplane.

G: That's really something.

C: It smells a little musty there; it came out of the basement.

G: Isn't that remarkable?

Well, you might want to allude to that during the course of the interview. Why don't you describe the helicopter for me?

C: The helicopter, of course, was a three-passenger, one-pilot aircraft.

G: It says here it's a four-passenger. Is that including the pilot?

C: Yes, it's four people, but one would be the pilot. Of course, this would vary with the size, too, because it wasn't a big seat in the back of that aircraft, and the weight also was a problem because of CG [center of gravity] problems. We'd have to carry ballast and put it back in the baggage compartment if we had too heavy a load in front. But it was a very reliable aircraft. It had a Pratt and Whitney junior engine, which was a well-proven engine in fixed wing and it was used all through World War II in all the training aircraft. The aircraft itself was basically the military R-5. It had a different shell on it to accommodate a passenger seat rather than two pilots in tandem for one mission or one pilot and three passengers for another. But the commercial [aircraft] was really the skeleton of an R-5. As far as the engine, the gear boxes, the rotors, the rotor blades, everything was the R-5. So it was a well-proven machine at that time.

G: It would go a hundred miles an hour?

C: Oh, it would do a little better than a hundred, I think, but it started to shake when you get up over that. You don't comfortably fly over a hundred in that thing.

G: What was the range on it?

C: Well, I really don't remember. I'd have to look it up in our books. I still have books on the aircraft.

G: The memo here says two hundred and fifty miles.

C: Well, I could certainly check between these cities exactly. Two hundred and fifty sounds like a reasonable distance, because I think flying between here and Washington, we'd always have to stop in Baltimore for fuel, so it sounds like a reasonable [distance].

G: Did it also have quite a range of what kind of gasoline you could burn in it?

C: No, we would burn a ninety octane, but it was widely available. Most airports had ninety octane, eighty octane; then you went up to a hundred, a hundred and thirty. The only thing is on a campaign where you go to all these small cities, you didn't have fuel available. There weren't airports at these places. So what we would do--and you may have seen it on some of these packages here listing the planning sheets like this--on Sunday afternoons we'd get together and the whole operating crew would go over the plan. At this time, I would go over the whole plan and decide where I would have to have fuel. Normally, we would end up at some town large enough to have a small airport, because he would usually give a speech at some town that was a little bigger. These towns always had a little airport where we had a chance [to refuel], and we normally had hangar space. We would put the aircraft in the hangar, do all our work at night and have it all ready in the morning. But during the morning we would have to be met probably once for fuel, so they would get fuel out to us in trucks in fifty-gallon drums.

Of course, if you've been in this business at all, you don't trust fuel like that. You see, for the old barnstormers and people that flew this way, they always strained their fuel, which is just what we did. My crew chief, Harry Nachlin, who was one of our senior and most capable people--he's retired now, lives out in San Diego--was a very good crew chief. But he would strain all this. He bought a large chamois skin, and this is what they used to strain their fuel through, the chamois. This would take the water out in addition to any other impurities. So every time we got fuel, he'd have to poke that chamois in there and go through it.

But we were surprised on our way home. We were flying over the Ozarks when the engine quit. The aircraft swerved about ninety degrees to the left and I got it into auto-rotation and the engine came back in again. Of course, we were sweating a little there, because there wasn't a spot around. We were right over all the woods, you know. So I thought, "I'd better get closer to the highway. In case this thing quits, I want to get down someplace where we can walk." So we headed on into Little Rock and Harry drained the sumps and we found all this stuff off the chamois in there. So this gasoline was eating the chamois right up, and we hadn't expected that. I lifted it up against the light and I could see the holes there just like someone had shot a shotgun through it. So he blew out the lines and drained the sump of the tank and got it started and we took off again. It happened once more right here over Norwalk as we were coming in to Bridgeport. We could almost see our field, and the thing sputtered again. She'd quit and come back in. So we went back up in to the plant, and they took the whole fuel system apart.

G: Did it ever quit during the campaign?

C: No. No, but I've often thought if we'd stayed there another week, it would have quit that next week, the same way as it did for us coming home. But the reason we came home is we were due for a maintenance check. We had a hundred-hour inspection to go through, and this was a rather detailed process at the time and the men need special tools.

G: Did you have any maintenance facilities while you were in Texas, at different airports or places?

C: We really didn't need anything. Other than the running post-flight and pre-flight checks that we did every day, every night and every morning, which is routine for an aircraft that's operating properly.

G: Did you do those?

C: No, the crew chief did. Of course, I would help him with it, but he did all the detail inspection.

G: So there were two of you, is that right?

C: Yes.

G: Oh, I see. Who was the crew chief?

C: Harry Nachlin. He remained with Sikorsky until a few years ago. He's retired now, lives in San Diego.

Yes, that was funny. Harry used to travel around with Johnson's engineer, the fellow that took care of the two radio stations he had. I understand there were two. I see in here they say one or something, or else it's that article in Atlantic Monthly that is starting, the excerpts, I think they mention one. But I think there were two, and this fellow was his chief engineer, and all he had to do was keep the radio working. We had a large radio set in the baggage compartment that had this large speaker that was fastened to one of the landing gear struts. You said you had some pictures, you may have seen this. This was what Johnson would speak through when he was taking to the people out on the fields. Wherever we saw more than two people and a big dog or something, we'd stop and talk, you know. We'd circle, and he'd have a chance to talk.

G: Speak from the air without landing?

C: Yes, without landing. And it wouldn't take very long, because these were completely impromptu, although the speech was pretty well canned. We had to make the next landing, the next city that was on the schedule. We did have a schedule to make.

G: Now, when you flew the aircraft to Texas, where did you go? Which city?

C: We went right into Dallas. This is where they put the signs on the tail cone and where the radio was installed. I think that must have taken about a day. We got in there on the thirteenth of June and on the fourteenth Johnson came out and he had a short flight and he also had some pictures taken of the aircraft. Then on the fifteenth, that's when we started into East Texas.

G: Had he ever flown in one before?

C: I don't know. I don't think so. I don't know.

G: Do you recall your first meeting with him? Or your first impression of him?

C: Well, yes, it was in the hangar there. We had hangar space in Dallas, and he came out and he looked it all over. Then we went for a short ride. I think he wanted to make sure that he hadn't bitten off more than he wanted.

G: What was his reaction to the helicopter?

C: I don't really recall, but he never seemed to be alarmed by being in it and riding in it. He was perfectly at ease, from what I could see, right from the first day.

G: Did he seem to like gadgets? I mean did he see this as something appealing because it was unique?

C: I think what he saw was the ability to draw a crowd, that was the biggest thing. Plus the fact that he could make these little speeches along the way to people without stopping. Of course we're making ninety or a hundred miles an hour and he'd cover a lot of distance in a couple of weeks. And he didn't do all the talking or speaking himself. I think along the line here you run into Joe Phipps.

Joe was in this business early, and he used to ride with him. Of course whenever Lyndon was on the ground and looking at you eye in the eye, he did the talking, but in the air he'd take a little rest, because he did do a lot of talking, and he would always say, "Tell them about me, Joe." That's this heading on one of these pages. Here, right here, [reading from document], "Tell them about me, Joe. Chapter Two." So I figure Joe must have written--had something else, too. So he would just turn the microphone over to Joe and Joe would go through this canned speech. But Joe, someplace along the line, became disillusioned. I don't know what happened, but he wasn't getting out of it what he thought he should have, I guess.

G: During the campaign?

C: Yes. He left early, and he said that he was going to write a book exposing this whole campaign business, you know, the whole works. I never did see the book, although when I saw this heading, "Tell them about me, Joe," it brought it all to mind. But Joe got out of it.

That was what he was going to call his book, too. He said it was going to be Tell Them About Me, Joe.

I think he had someone else for a short while, I don't recall. But then he would take people, friends, along the way, from one stop to another.

G: Local politicians?

C: Yes, and people in the group that were working. Of course, the two hardest workers in this group I think were Sam and Dorothy Plyler that I mentioned to you. I think most of these people--I'm sure you understand and people in politics do, too--that they're really not in there because of their deep friendships, they're in there for what they're going to get out of it. I think that's what most of these people were there for. We were out at the Johnson's home one time in Austin. It was close to the end, and after that Harry and I stopped with Sam and Dorothy at their home and we had a couple of late drinks and we were talking. We remarked, "Gee, these people are really putting a lot into this thing. The two of you are working like fourteen, sixteen hours a day." You have to, you know. And Sam was making every stop that we did, because we insisted that there be someone on the ground so we didn't have some kid running into the tail rotor or something. We wouldn't land unless we had some protection on the ground. So as soon as we got on that ground, old Sam took off for the next town, because he had to have a head start, and sometimes it was a pretty good distance. But Sam, he mentioned one time that his cut was going to be commissions on all the advertising that was sold at those two radio stations, so this was what he was working for. I don't know how all that stuff came out or whether Sam was just thinking about it, but they all had a reason for their working.

I remember one time we were flying out in West Texas. Sam used to drive wide open, as fast as that car would go, and the state police caught him. So I'm coming into the school yard that we're going to land in and I see the state police. Of course, the police were around quite often when they knew this was going to happen. And there's Sam's car. I come in and he says, "Oh, am I happy you got here, because I told this trooper when he caught me that I had to get up to the school yard because a helicopter was coming in there." And the trooper told him, "Okay. I'll follow you. If that helicopter doesn't come in there, you're going to jail." So Sam got out of that one all right.

But one day we stopped and I think in this chronology they talk about him stopping someplace where a fellow owned a Chevrolet garage, one of his backers, and he changed the oil in all the cars that night. We had quite a group of cars following this thing around. So he changed the oil in all the cars, and he forgot to put oil back in Sam's. Sam was going out of town full blast again, because there was only on or off with Sam, and Harry and this engineer were driving out on the highway and Sam came by them about seventy miles an hour and they said it looked like his car blew up. The engine just came apart completely. There was Sam on the side of the road and had to get him another car to finish up. It had no oil in it.

G: What about the other advance men that traveled? George Bolton, was he one of them?

C: Well, I don't remember him. I remember Woody [Warren Woodward]. Woody seemed to be at Lyndon's elbow most of the time. I ran into him years later down in Washington at the American Helicopter Society convention. We had a big display of helicopters down at Hains Point, and here came Woody there with cameras hanging all over him, just like the tourists. He was working in Lyndon Johnson's Washington office, I guess taking care of constituents. He probably would know more about how they got that helicopter, because he apparently was wound up in it there.

I think the other area that tells me something, when we got down there a little farther, is where Warren Woodward that evening took the train from Amarillo to Dallas with Johnson and the next day they met with Stuart Symington. I had heard his name mentioned with the business of getting the helicopter, so whether it was through the air force officer or how they got it, how the payments were made [I don't know]. The only thing I heard of course was Johnson used to say a hundred or a hundred and five vets up at the hospital threw in five dollars apiece and they got this for him so he could go out and talk to the people. But I don't think five dollars apiece for a hundred people would have gotten that helicopter.

G: What do you think the cost of that was? Do you have an idea?

C: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I was trying to think just what it cost an hour at that time, but it had to be like fifty, sixty dollars to run the thing an hour.

G: Really?

C: Oh, yes.

G: You're including the gas, your time--

C: My time, the crew chief and the wear and tear on the helicopter.

G: Did you do more than eight hours a day?

C: I see an eight here on cross-country when we were going, but otherwise it ran two, three, four hours a day. But on the cross-country I have eight here one time. Well, from Dallas to Paducah, Kentucky that one day there was eight hours. You know, eight hours in this thing is not like a fixed wing or a helicopter today where you can trim up the stick, take your hands off and sit back. That helicopter, when the rotor was turning, someone had to hold that stick, and that meant eight hours on that stick. And it wasn't a soft stick, this thing was working against you. It was working against you and eight hours was a long time to hold it. But you got used to it after a while.

G: What did that experience demonstrate to you about LBJ's campaigning?

C: Well, you know, I have never been exposed to really the inside. There was quite a crew working on this. I'd see them on weekends. He had his speechwriters and he had all his front men and of course he had backers and people you never saw. It was hard to believe when you--of course I heard these speeches time and time and time again and there were only about maybe four basic ones and there were throw-offs from these depending upon where you were. But you'd see the people standing there listening to this, you know.

I remember talking to one of the truckdrivers that came out and brought gas, and he was standing around watching after we got through. I said, "Boy, isn't that really something?" He said, "If you think that's something, you should have listened to this guy Pappy O'Daniel that was in here before. He was <u>really</u> something. They used to come around with these hymn singers and had this flour barrel there. You'd see these old rednecks with their last half-dollar in their pocket." He said, "They would tighten up their belt a notch and go in and throw their last half buck in the flour barrel. They figured he was the only man that really made money on a campaign." So I thought, "Well, maybe that's Texas politics."

G: Was Johnson a good campaigner?

C: He certainly knew how to handle people I think. I think he did. Of course, the people that were supposed to be working for him, I don't think he showed them too much pity.

G: Can you give me an example?

C: Well, no, not really.

G: He was irritable, I suppose.

C: Well, I can see that he probably could be even riding in the back of that thing for as long as he did from early morning to night and meeting all these people. I remember Harry used to meet us about the middle of the morning and the middle of the afternoon to see if I needed anything or he'd help with the refueling. And he'd always be the first one up to the helicopter. As soon as I set down, he would come out of the crowd and walk up. Of course, most of these briefing sheets would say the man that's going to meet you is so-and-so, somebody's brother or something, you know. I remember this one time--because Harry would always be the first one up there, you know--this one day Johnson was shaking hands and goes right out and shakes hands with Harry every time. So this one day he said, "Jesus Christ, you again?"

(Laughter)

So Harry shook hands with him a lot, about twice a day.

I think he pretty much understood these people. It was a case of getting close to them. Without the helicopter, he never would have seen these people.

In this chronology, I think you see one point in here where we ran into high winds. We were out in West Texas and the winds were hitting fifty, sixty miles an hour, and that's a little bit too much for a helicopter, even that one, which was bigger than the one used later. We stopped at noon, and I flew on into Waco where we were able to get hangar space and put the helicopter in there, shut it down and put it in there. We went in and stayed in Waco. Well, they finished that afternoon by automobile, with their group of automobiles, and the next day they went all the way through with automobiles, and the following day they called me. I started getting telephone calls in the afternoon from Dallas, from Austin, from San Antonio, to ask me when we'd get the helicopter back in the air again. This one fellow said, "You know, the only people he talks to are a couple of old people that can't get out of the square and a few old dogs that are running around. There just aren't any people around." So he knew the value of drawing the crowd, and there was no sense in just traveling that way. I think Phipps brings this out in his write-up here.

And the winds died down. They got down to forty that day. I think we were down that half day and two whole days. The next day we met him out at College Station, I think it was, where he spoke at--is that Texas A & M [University] that's out there?

G: Yes.

C: Well, that's where he spoke to the group of students. We picked him up there, and we started the tour again. It's coincidental that one of the students in the crowd there that day listening to him later went into the service and became a helicopter pilot and worked for us at Sikorsky.

G: Is that right?

C: Yes. His name is Don Gordon [?]. He lives just out of Dallas.

G: Did the press ever travel with him on the helicopter?

C: Yes. He had a number of people that rode at different times. I can't remember who they all were, but I remember there were women and it seems to me there were press people. I don't recall specifically anyone from the press, but he did have a variety of people.

G: So Sunday was the day that you didn't campaign and you had your strategy meeting, is that right?

C: Yes. That's when they set everything up for the following week. I was able to get my maps all drawn out, and we decided where we needed the fuel.

G: Where were these meetings generally held?

C: In a hotel room.

G: In Austin?

C: Well, I think maybe Austin once, but it was in whatever big town we wound up in on Saturday night. You could probably tell by these things here or even on this chart here what town [it would be]. But it'd usually be a pretty good-sized town.

G: Who do you think was really behind his campaign in terms of giving him advice? Did you have an impression of who the real strategist was?

C: No. I never did know. I know one time we went into this group of people and there were a number of them typing and writing, but I didn't know any of them. They were kind of behind the scenes.

G: How about Alvin Wirtz? Was he at all--?

C: I never met him.

G: John Connally?

C: No. But I know when we were in East Texas--it was Lufkin, I think. Isn't that where the scrub pine is and there's a big paper pulp factory there?

G: Southland [Paper Mill] or whatever, Mr. Kurth, I think.

C: Yes. Ernest Kurth is the name that sticks in my mind. We circled this place, and he let all the people out of the plant and Lyndon spoke to them from the air. That night when we stopped, Harry and I, by the time we put the helicopter away, and then we got into town and had dinner, we never got back in until about nine o'clock. Quite often in these small towns, there wasn't any place to eat at that time. We'd probably have a sandwich at a drugstore or something. I remember this one night I came into the hotel and I saw Mr. Johnson in the lobby with a gentleman, and he called me over and introduced me, and I think it was Ernest Kurth. I believe this man had cancer of his throat, because he had a tube sticking out and you could understand him, but not very well. I know the next day when Mr. Johnson and I were flying, he said to me, "You know, Jim, that man is one of the richest people in Texas, but he can't do anything for his throat. There isn't anything he can do that money'll do for him."

G: Did you have an opportunity to see who his campaign backers were, his financial backers in that campaign?

C: No. I think that last day when we flew from Austin up to [Dallas], there was a big picnic. I was surprised to hear there was such a large group of Czechoslovakians, some group in that part of Texas. But it was on the Fourth of July. It seems to me his brother rode with him; he looked a lot like him. West, West, Texas. That's where I dropped him off. From there on, Harry and I went on up to Dallas and we got our ship ready to come back. But there seemed to be a long discussion about finances and things going on in the back seat during

that flight from Austin up to West. But it really was none of my business. I didn't pay attention to it.

G: Did you see any evidence at this point that the campaign had serious financial problems, that they were under-financed?

C: No. I never [saw that].

G: In East Texas, did you happen to go to Marshall or Karnack or Mrs. Johnson's hometown or anything?

C: Well, we were in Marshall. I think we stayed there one night.

G: Her father lived in Karnack.

C: No, unless they're in this chronology, I wouldn't remember the names. But I know Marshall is familiar. We covered so many towns a day.

Have you had a chance to talk to Woody?

G: He has been interviewed. I didn't do the interview.

Horace Busby went along on the helicopter some, too, didn't he?

C: That name is familiar, but it may be because I knew another Horace Busby. So the name sounds familiar, but I don't think it's the same connection.

One of these Sunday meetings, I recall, there was quite a group of people in this room when they made their plans. Of course there was a lot of joking going around after it was over and this fellow said to me they want to know if I wanted to be sheriff of Duval County. You know, it seemed to me there'd been a sheriff shot there a short time before there, and I told them no, I didn't care much for that. They said, "Oh, sure, we control that county." I guess they did.

G: The helicopter did not fly there, though, did it?

C: I don't recall. I don't recall the county as such.

G: Were there any particular stops that were especially noteworthy because of one incident or another?

C: We had one stop where they had a large barbecue, rodeo or something there. I forget where it was. I think it's in this area, too. It was a funny thing. Johnson used to pitch his hat out of the helicopter, you know. We'd go over the crowd several times, in fact, this would bring the people in. As we got very low coming in, he would pitch his hat out, and some little kid would grab it and come running up with it later, and he'd give them a dollar for the hat.

Well, this particular town where they had the rodeo, he pitched his hat out and some kid grabbed it and he took off. He took off with that hat and he never came back.

Johnson was sitting there with no hat, so one of his backers there went--well, first, he had another hat. These were Stetsons. Woody had sent these hats up to the Stetson factory, which was here in Danbury, Connecticut at the time, and he had them completely cleaned and blocked and everything for the campaign. One of these hats was in this car that Harry Nachlin, my engineer, and his radio engineer were riding in. But they had so much stuff in that car that it was just packed, and Harry Nachlin had been sitting on this hat for about two weeks. So they ran down to the car to get this hat and of course, they looked at it, and he couldn't put that hat on. So they ran into town and they got another one, and he started out with a new hat at that point.

G: But he didn't make a practice of giving the hats away? He did it and wanted to get them back?

C: Oh, no, no. This kid just decided that he was going to take the hat and he took off for the boondocks with the hat in his hand. Of course, that got a big laugh, too.

G: My impression is the helicopter attracted children, who in turn brought their parents out.

C: I see that's Joe Phipps'--I hadn't thought of it that way, but I'm sure it's like anything else, whether it's a helicopter or an elephant or anything else. The kid can't go alone, so the parents go with him. That could very well be true.

G: Did you campaign in any areas where there was demonstrative anti-Johnson feeling in the crowd?

C: No. I don't recall at any time that there was any problem. I had to be careful. I didn't want anyone throwing anything. Helicopters are rather sensitive, especially around the rotor and rotor heads. But never did I see anything that was anti-Johnson.

G: Wasn't there one occasion where you did land in a rodeo or an arena or something like that where--a stadium?

C: Well, we landed at this one. I think that's where the barbecue was.

G: Was it difficult to land in that--?

C: No, not particularly. I think the thing is it may not be difficult to land, but if you consider the people that are on the outside, I mean, you consider blowing dirt and things on them, that's the reason you don't land. It's not always because you couldn't land there if you wanted to, you see. But I don't think you gain any friends if you put about a quarter inch of dust all over them.

G: Would an area be cordoned off, or how would you--?

C: Normally it would be an open field, and they would keep the people out. Like I say, old Sam Plyler would be there. He'd be the first as soon as the helicopter got in. Once we got the rotor stopped, people would stand back and Johnson would take the other mike. They had two mikes. One they used in the air and one they used on ground. Because of the noisy background, they had to have a more sensitive mike in the air. Then he would take over the other mike and speak on that. And if they had a sound truck available, then of course he would go on the sound truck.

G: Did the campaign seem to fatigue him? He was making an awful lot of speeches per day.

C: I don't think so. Of course I didn't know. I think he got adequate rest at night. There'd usually be some meeting every night.

G: Did you go with him on those occasions?

C: No, I didn't go on any of them. We'd take care of the aircraft. That was our reason, basically. We were just chauffeurs, you know, just to fly him around, and of course we were going to do it the best way that we could, and the safest way.

G: Any other stops? Waxahachie?

C: In my log, I only tell the stop--where we started in the morning and where we [stopped] overnight.

G: Of course on that outline, it mentions a lot of the [stops].

C: Well, there were a lot. I added up all these stops here, and I think it was over a hundred. I think it was a hundred and eight or ten towns that we got to in a couple of weeks.

G: Typically during a Johnson campaign, he would start to lose his voice from making so many speeches.

C: I think maybe this is one of the reasons he would turn the mike when we were flying over to Joe or one of his other helpers and let them do the talking to give him a chance to get his voice back.

G: Another thing, his hands would start to get raw and irritated. Do you recall that?

C: No, I don't recall that.

G: Do you recall aides bringing changes of clothes so that he could have a fresh shirt at stops?

C: I think they would do that at noon. They usually arranged that where he had a chance to change clothes or maybe even shower at noon, and have a fresh start in the afternoon. They

would have enough time at noon, maybe a couple of hours, where there'd be a lunch and an opportunity to have some rest.

G: He called the helicopter the Johnson City Windmill, I believe.

C: Yes, yes.

G: Can you tell me the origin of that name?

C: Only what he has here, that his wife mentioned that it looked like their windmill in Johnson City.

G: You have some more notes, I think. Are there any--?

C: No, I think what I've got here are pretty well covered. I thought that maybe Woody would be able to tell you more about how they got the helicopter, because I wasn't privy to the planning.

G: Sure. Why did the Sikorsky leave and the Bell come on the scene?

C: We had this major inspection coming up, and we weren't able to do it with the tools that we had with us. And in fact the time was up. We are allowed to fly the aircraft back to the factory to have the inspection, but we wouldn't be allowed to use it commercially.

G: I see.

C: Once your time is up--and I believe it was a hundred-hour inspection--those inspections were quite involved.

G: The Dallas Morning News did a piece at the time saying that you were going back to where you only worked five days a week.

C: Yes. Who knows? We work long hours at Sikorsky, too. Weekends and--

G: Why didn't Johnson get another Sikorsky though, do you know?

C: There wasn't one available.

G: Really? Do you think they decided that a smaller aircraft might be [better]?

C: I think that's all they could get, frankly. I would see no reason for taking that if they could have gotten another Sikorsky, as I'm sure he would have been a lot more comfortable. Plus the fact that he could accommodate more people.

But it must have taken on with other politicians, because I recall when we were coming back, we landed in Texarkana, our first stop out of Dallas, and there was

someone--I think he was running for governor of Arkansas--and he practically begged me to stay there and fly him on his campaign. He didn't care what the costs were, he didn't care anything, but he had seen what had happened. I don't recall his name, but it seems to me there was a William Jennings [?] in there someplace. I recall that part. But he was quite a politician, and it seems to me he was going for governor. I referred him to this HAT outfit. I didn't know whether they had their aircraft back up again or not, but I don't think they did. How he made out, he may have found a Bell or something else.

G: What other impressions of Lyndon Johnson did you gain from this experience?

C: Well, mine have always been different than what I've read, you know. He was a very ambitious person, and like I say, I was not a part of his organization. I was just down there to fly him around. I know that one day we were flying and quite often we'd be alone, you know, talking. He said to me one day, "Jim, if I ever get to be president, I'll make you a general." That was funny. I always remembered that. Of course I never forced it.

(Laughter)

G: Do you think he had ambitions to be president at that point?

C: I've often wondered. Apparently he did. Apparently he did.

G: Did he talk about the Senate race?

C: No, there was very little that we got into. He would talk maybe personally about some of the people, to tell me who they were, someone he knew for a long time or something, but it was on a completely different level. We never got into politics or--

G: Did he talk about his opponent, Coke Stevenson?

C: No. The only thing I would hear was what he would be telling the people. No, I imagine Coke Stevenson was as much of a politician as Lyndon was. He just lost the ball game that day, I guess.

G: Anything else on Lyndon Johnson from your perspective?

C: Well, no, not really. Not him. Their helicopters, though, the presidents', there's one right behind you on the wall. There's a presidential helicopter and they're ours. Right after Eisenhower, they flew our helicopters, and Johnson, of course, was one of them. He flew on our helicopters. I used to check them out when they came in to Sikorsky for overhauls. I would quite often be down there flying those helicopters checking them out.

G: Did you have any contact with Johnson after this campaign?

C: Never. Never. I ran into Woody that one time, like I say, and I asked him, "Woody, how in the world do you people work like that?" These people started way before I got there, and I

only had a couple of weeks in there, and of course one week going down and one week coming back there was a lot of flying. And I said, "Woody, how in the world do you do this? Sam and Dorothy, too." He said, "Hey, Jim, we only do this for six months once every six years." So that was the answer, I guess. I had to keep going with my five days a week.

G: Anything else on the campaign at all?

C: No, I can say it was well-planned and there were a lot of people involved, I think a lot more than most people knew.

G: Well, I really appreciate it.

(Interruption)

This was during the strong wind?

C: Yes, and we were on the ground. This is probably the first time I really had the feel of what it was doing for the campaign, because I got on this conference call with these three gentlemen, like I say, one from Austin and one from Dallas and one out of San Antonio. They were very much concerned. I told them when it [the wind] would just die down [we would leave]. Of course, they couldn't cancel out, because these things were all planned ahead of time. But they found out in making these stops by automobile they just weren't cutting it at all. I said, "As soon as we can get out, we'll get out," which was the end of the second day. We got out early in the morning and picked him up again.

G: Did they try to persuade you to get out earlier than--?

C: No, they didn't. I think they believed what I was telling them. There was no reason for me to tell them any different. It was for his own good and for mine, too, and the helicopter. The bad part is cranking up the rotor and shutting the rotor down in high winds, because the rotor is fully articulated and the blades are allowed to flap. When the blade is going at its normal speed, the centrifugal force will hold it out, but when you're shutting it down at low speeds, the blade'll get a lot of lift and flap way up in the air, then fall back down and probably chop off the tail boom. So you have to be careful in the high winds. Once you get in the air and if you don't mind bouncing around a bit, it doesn't make any difference. But shutting down and starting up was the dangerous part of it.

G: Did the helicopter have doors on it?

C: Oh, yes. Two sliding doors, one for me on one side, and one for the passengers on the other side.

G: You never had any problem with things falling out of the helicopter?

C: Well, no. There was adequate room.

G: Was the heat excessive?

C: Yes, we had no air conditioning in those days. It was hot. With all the glass you have there, the sun beats down and it's very warm. The back seat was shaded, but the front was bubble, and it was very warm.

G: Were there places where you wanted to land that when you got to the site you discovered you couldn't land either because of wires or crowds?

C: It happened a couple of times, but in most cases, there was a very nice spot maybe a half a block away or a block away, and the crowd didn't seem to mind walking down the street. The whole thing showed up anyway. Instead of getting right in the middle of town, I remember one particular place where a building had been torn down and the bricks and dust and everything were there, and I thought, "Jeez, we can't go in there and blow that stuff in those people's eyes." Because you get an awful blast off that thing, and the space was small. You see, the town was small, and I could go down a half a block and here was a big field. So we landed right close by, and there was a fence to protect us from the [crowd]. I suppose it's one thing then if the people that owned the field were against it, we may have had a problem, but this never occurred.

G: Well, I certainly do appreciate it. You've been most helpful.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]