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GEORGE E. REEDY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW XXI
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GEORGE E. REEDY

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INTERVIEW XXI

DATE: January 7, 1987

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE REEDY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Professor Reedy's office, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: As we begin our discussion of 1962, one of the elements that seems to emerge in the files [and] newspaper stories [is] Vice President Johnson's efforts to combat segregation at Houston hotels, particularly the Shamrock and I guess the Rice Hotel. Any recollections of that?

R: None at all. Not on that one. Do you have any idea of precisely what he did do?

(Interruption)

--on his own, though, by the way.

G: Any recollections of his efforts to keep Goodfellow Field in San Angelo open?

R: I don't know what he did specifically, but I do know that he worked at it rather hard. I think it was mostly a question of keeping pressure on the air force. You know, on a thing like that, what you really get is a lot of private telephone calls, and nothing else, maybe a letter occasionally. But keeping Goodfellow Air Base going was one of his major priorities, because that was about the only thing that was out in that part of Texas where a federal official could be effective one way or the other. You ever been through that part of Texas?

G: Yes.

R: You know what I'm talking about, then. Not much there except sheep and goats, mostly

goats.

G: John Connally left the Navy Department to run for governor that year. Any recollections on that race and LBJ's involvement in it, or noninvolvement in it?

R: He didn't take any part in it. You don't in Texas; there's a--and if he had it would have been very, very much *sub rosa*, because there's a whole Texas tradition against politicians getting into each others' races. The ideal in Texas is that every politician runs in [on?] his own. You will, generally speaking, get two types: one type of politician that is shooting for the governorship and spends most of his or her time working on local offices leading to the governorship; and then the federal politicians who spend all of their time shooting at the Congress. But you do not have tickets in Texas. You don't have Governor A running along with Lieutenant Governor B along with Attorney General C. It's unknown.

G: Any insights on LBJ's reaction to Connally running for governor?

R: I don't think he had any reaction in particular. He thought very highly of John. That's putting it mildly. I think he realized that someday John was going to make a major bid for political office. I never heard him mention--I was aware of it, that John Connally was running, but I never heard him discuss it, which means to me that he merely took it for granted, because he always--almost always--when he was uncertain about political issues he almost always talked about them to me.

G: In February there was John Glenn's space flight, and LBJ went to New York with the Glens for a ticker-tape parade after that. Any recollections of that?

R: Nothing that is of any great importance; it went off according to schedule. I think that's the main thing that I remember, that everything went according to schedule. And what's

his name, who was head of space at that point?

G: James Webb.

R: I was with Webb when the shot went off. I'll never forget the look of triumph in his face. He said, "I told you this was going to go, and go right on time." But aside from that I don't think there is anything that's not in the press. There was a program; they kept it, and it worked. There was absolutely nothing there except what was in the papers. I remember it well. It's not a question of my having forgotten. It's just that what was on the surface was what happened.

G: It was apparently one of the largest parades.

R: Oh, yes. It was fantastic. It was unbelievable. But what else can you say? It was just an awful lot of people and a lot of ticker and tape and a lot of enthusiastic cheering crowds. But there was nothing, nothing whatsoever that had any political overtones to it.

G: How did LBJ happen to be involved in the parade?

R: Oh, simply--don't forget, he was the author of the [National Aeronautics and] Space Act. He had been chairman of the committee [National Aeronautics and Space Council]. First of all, he had been chairman of the [Senate] Preparedness [Investigating] Subcommittee, which had taken a look into the whole space proposition when Sputnik and Muttnik first went up. Then later he was chairman of the committee that hammered out the bill. He *was* outer space, really. Without him I don't think we would have gone along nearly as fast as we did. You may remember, Eisenhower was very skeptical of the whole thing. Eisenhower treated it entirely as a scientific experiment in which they were going to launch a basketball into the outer zones. So it would have been--also at that particular

point, by the way, at this point Johnson was chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Outer Space, Science, Engineering and Technology. So it was very normal for him to be in that parade.

G: Did he have a cordial relationship with John Glenn?

R: Not particularly. Nothing wrong with it, it was just [that the] two men never got close enough to each other to have what you would call a relationship.

G: There were accusations that Johnson during that trip really attempted to dominate the publicity himself.

R: (Laughter) What do you think? Of course he did. I don't know where that gets you, though. He didn't try to stand in front of John Glenn or anything like that, but he always tried to get on top of the publicity whenever he could. There wasn't anything unusual to that, nor anything objectionable either.

(Interruption)

--anything that Bobby Kennedy did. The antagonism between those two men was one of the strongest I've ever seen in my life. It was just like two dogs coming into a room, when all of a sudden you hear a low growl. LBJ was determined that Bobby was out to dump him whenever he could. Well, he suspected Bobby of being the inspiration for every nasty story about Bobby Baker, or every nasty story about that melon grower in West Texas.

G: Billie Sol Estes?

R: Billie Sol Estes. He was even loaded with stories about Bobby Kennedy having special briefings of the press downtown. I'll never forget, once he had Loye Miller in the office

and he started bawling him--Loye Miller from *Time* magazine--he started bawling him out, saying he knew all about those briefings that were being held downtown. Well, that just bewildered Loye because he didn't, and neither did anybody else. I'm fairly confident myself that that did not take place, because if it had one of my friends in the press would have tipped me off. But if he had a case of chilblains he'd blame it on Bobby.

G: Anything with regard to this Kennedy trip around the world in 1962?

R: Well, he just regarded it as a publicity stunt on Bobby's part to get more power. As I said, Bobby couldn't do anything that would please LBJ, nothing, except commit suicide.

G: Was it mutual?

R: Oh, yes. Bobby really did dislike him, I think quite possibly because he saw Johnson as the only barrier to complete domination of American politics by the Kennedys. Of the Kennedy brothers, Bobby was by far the most ambitious, the most power-hungry, if you want to put it in those terms. He was just bitterly opposed to anybody who might stand between *the* Kennedy family and its power. He wasn't like Ted; Ted is very easy to get along with, really. And Jack could be troublesome, but not like Bobby. And by the way, it might well be that Bobby stirred up some of those stories; I wouldn't rule that out. But this business about briefings downtown and all that sort of thing, uh-uh.

(Interruption)

I wonder what it was. What the devil was it?

G: This was a case where the air force wanted a bomber, but apparently [Secretary Robert] McNamara did not.

R: Well, what I'm wondering [is], the biggest argument McNamara had with the services was his continuing search for common weapons that would be used by all three. Now, when it came to aircraft that's where he got into a lot of trouble, because the navy concept of an efficient fighter aircraft was quite different from the army concept. And I'm wondering if this is one of those situations. You see, the requirements of the two forces were so totally different. The navy had to have planes that could take off and land in that very short landing space. To get that they had to sacrifice long-distance flying, so to speak. That could have been what it was. I've just forgotten now precisely what.

(Interruption)

G: Anything on the air force lobbying to get that plane?

R: Well, of course, they lobbied like nobody's business. They lobbied me and they lobbied Johnson as much as they could. They had a rather effective lobby. Boy, they worked at it.

G: Why were they effective? What was their technique?

R: Well, [in the] first place they had some natural advantages. Suppose you're a senator and you want to go somewhere, France, Sweden, Italy. The air force always has always got a plane for you, or they can find one going your way. And it's always going to just by accident happen to be a very comfortable, well-decked-out plane. That's for openers. But secondly, those flyboys are usually fairly good-looking guys who are respectable without being extreme, as the marines are. And third, during WWII, the air force had loaded itself with top-notch public relations people and the tradition carried on. I remember when I was up on the Hill, I could always tell you who the air force lobbyists

were but I'd really have to stop and think hard as to who the navy lobbyist was, and who the army lobbyist was. They were there all right, but not like--the air force swarmed all over you. And boy, could the air force organize trips. They could really take care of it.

G: Was the possibility of building these planes in Texas a--?

R: No. Well, it might have been, I don't know. But that wasn't the argument. Texas was not quite as wild to build airplanes as, let's say, California or Washington or even Detroit.

I'm pretty sure that the major argument here centered around McNamara's efforts to get common weapons, that is, weapons that would fit all the services. You see, what McNamara was doing, McNamara was trying to put warfare into a configuration of an equilateral equation and setting up all these concepts of cost effectiveness. How much bang do you get for your buck; how many people do you kill for every bullet--that kind of thing. And this is where the fighting centered around, because the services have little or no use for cost accounting. McNamara was applying cost accounting to everything and I'm pretty sure that's the problem here.

G: Would the air force tie something to this, such as a base closure or keeping a base open?

R: Oh, I'm sure they would; of course they would. They wouldn't do it ostentatiously, and of course they couldn't close it against a decision by Congress, but they could put it in a list of those they wanted to close. But somehow I don't think that figured here, because I don't think the battle here was between the air force and Congress. I think it was between the air force and McNamara.

(Interruption)

G: Chuck Stone had written a letter regarding the employment efforts of the President's

Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity.

R: Yes, Chuck was quite militant. I think we met and talked about it, but I don't think any conclusions were reached. Chuck at that point--was that when he was editor of the *Baltimore [Washington D.C.] Afro-American*? I'm pretty sure no conclusions were reached. I think what Chuck wanted, Chuck wanted more enforcement powers, if I remember correctly. Is that what you--am I right there? [He] wanted the committee to cancel some contract somewhere in order to enforce its equal employment opportunity rulings, and Johnson was always very uneasy about that, and I think properly so, because there was some legal question as to whether they could do it. Let's see, April . . .

G: Twenty-fifth.

R: As I recall, it was a--what they got was a tour around the Ranch, dinner, I think--either dinner or lunch, I've forgotten which now, or maybe both. It was nothing but a relaxed, pleasant afternoon. I don't think the press was present. I'm not sure of that, but I don't think it was. No great significance, but . . .

There wasn't much for the New York City trip. "Flies to St. Louis, Missouri; he's with Senator Edward V. Long and Governor John M. Dalton."

(Interruption)

The thing I remember about the luncheon in Kansas City was that Truman was unusually exuberant that day and full of the kind of conversation you don't have when ladies are present.

I don't remember very much about Walla Walla, but that doesn't matter. There was no terribly great significance to those; he was just sort of, I'd say, touching base.

G: Okay. You say you were on the flight?

R: Yes; well, they had a very small plane--just about Beechcraft, I think, and there was Johnson, Mrs. Johnson, Mary Margaret [Wiley Valenti] and me. But the impression I have is, the flight was out of Washington. The flight I remember vividly, very vividly. It's one of those things you would never forget. It was more like a funeral, frankly.

G: Tell me about it.

R: There was a deep, glum air; Mrs. Johnson very sweetly asking where were they [the Valentis] going to live after they got married, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. I'm accustomed to wedding parties being fairly joyous. Well, believe me, we celebrated my father's death with more hilarity than was exhibited on that trip. I know when we got down there to Houston and he and Mary Margaret--he made a wedding settlement on Mary Margaret, that's where he gave her that house on San Felipe. I think that the last I saw of Mary Margaret was in the church. But it was--again, as I said, I'm under the impression that that trip was from Washington.

G: He gave her away at the wedding, is that right?

R: Yes. I remember his speaking at the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. I was on that. He'd always have me with him when it came to dealing with unions.

Ah! Now wait, this is beginning to shape up. He spoke in Atlantic City where he had his--he always went over big with the ILGW, real big, and Dave Dubinsky always gave him a big warm build-up; it went well.

Then he flew to Chicago to speak to the National Restaurant Association at McCormick Place. I remember something had gone wrong with the space shot. I've

forgotten what it was now, but I know the word was being fed to me and he was just in a foul temper. What in the devil had it been? Something had gone wrong. I can still recall walking down that corridor to get to the car, and his just sizzling because I was on the phone when he thought I should have been handling the press. Well, I *had* to be on the phone to find out about that astronaut, whatever he was.

I guess this may be right, then, that either he went from there to the LBJ Ranch--no, wait, this seems to leave out the wedding altogether.

(Interruption)

"7:22: Johnsons drive to Ocean City with [Homer] Thornberry, the [Walter] Jenkinses and Marie Fehmer to briefly attend the opening of Bobby Baker's club, The Carousel." That's not a club, of course, it was a hotel. Bobby had really put on a big show. He had most of the guests brought out by a bus. The bus was loaded with champagne and various types of hors d'oeuvres. He invited all of his congressional friends and LBJ. And LBJ smelled something wrong with it. He knew there was something wrong here. And of course, he was quite right. And I did too; I just didn't go at all. But he gathered up a few people; I think you have them listed here: Thornberry, the Jenkinses, Marie Fehmer. And he was in and out so goddamned fast that nobody even got a picture of him there, that I know of. But he just kept as far away from it as he could. As it turned out later, that was one of the things that got Bobby sent to jail; he falsified an emergency loan application. I remember I saw the thing a few weeks later, and it wasn't as elaborate as people generally assumed. It was just a modern motel, that was all.

But I'll never forget . . . It was funny about Bobby. Bobby did an awful lot of

things that worried him. After Bobby got his law degree, you know, Bobby opened an office downtown. And then there was this Carousel. And by the way, the first time I ever heard of it, I heard of it from somebody living in Rehoboth [Beach, Delaware] who said that they heard that Johnson was putting up this hotel. But somehow, even though he suspected Bobby, he couldn't quite bring himself to really break relations. Both Walter and I tried on more than one occasion to warn him, but he was sort of smitten with Bobby, really smitten with him. [I] mean by that, I think he looked upon Bobby as the son that he'd never had; he got this ambitious southern kid--

(Interruption)

He was absolutely guiltless in all of Bobby's shenanigans, although Bobby was throwing his name around so much that--

G: The one where he was linked to Baker regarded an insurance policy.

R: I'll tell you what happened there. Don't you know the story?

G: No.

R: What had happened is that--what the hell was the name of that guy?

G: Reynolds?

R: Reynolds, that's it. Reynolds was a friend of Bobby's, and so Bobby steered him to Walter Jenkins with the idea of selling this million-dollar insurance policy. Well, Walter didn't have anything to do with that; he just told him to go down to talk to KTBC. Now, at KTBC they had a reason for wanting Johnson to have that kind of a policy. Texas is a community property state. That meant that if he died, half of KTBC would go into the Johnson estate, where it would have to pay inheritance taxes. In order to pay the

inheritance taxes they would have had to sell KTBC at a loss. So they wanted a very heavy strong insurance policy on his life. And Reynolds went on down to Texas and sold Jesse Kellam and the board down there on it. Now, I imagine Johnson knew about it in the sense that they said, "Look, we've got this insurance policy at a good deal. Is it okay if we go ahead?" I mean that's that way. But I don't think he was aware of the fact that he was actually doing a favor for a friend of Bobby Baker's.

I'll never forget what happened then. One Sunday--I always read the *Baltimore Sun* on Sunday, because I thought it was about the best paper in the country at that time. And picking up the *Baltimore Sun*, I found this long interview with Reynolds in which he was talking all over the place about Johnson. I got hold of the White House operator and she found Reynolds. I said, "Well, Mr. Reynolds, aren't you going a little bit far as an insurance man, exposing your client to publicity?" He said, "Well, that reporter double-crossed me." I said, "Well, why did you have to talk to him that way in the first place? You know, it seems to me that an insurance agent that does things like this is going to get in trouble sooner or later." Well, later on it turned out that I had called him and threatened him, because I said that, "You're going to get in trouble sooner or later." Well, I just meant that he'd get a reputation and nobody would trust him, nobody would buy insurance from him. But this was more a Bobby Baker promotion than it was anything else.

G: There was a question of a television set that--

R: Yes. I'm not fully familiar with that. I think Reynolds bought the set and gave it to Bobby to give to Johnson. Or just bought it to give to Bobby and Bobby, trying to make

some time with Johnson, gave it to him. But Johnson was terribly naive where people like Bobby Baker were concerned. From the very beginning, I had two or three occasions like that, where the guy would be just absolutely gaga over some dumb kid, I think just because he was kid and because he had a southern accent. You could get away with murder where he was concerned, and Bobby did. Bobby used his name everywhere. Bobby had both me and Walter very much concerned.

(Interruption)

--is that Peace Corps camp--boy oh boy, that was rugged. They put those people through a regimen that would have killed, I think, a marine corps recruit at Parris Island. I'll never forget their physical training instructor. Wow! Talk about King Kong. That's exactly what he looked like: King Kong. And they were out in this jungle, they were crawling over vines and wading streams, and they turned them loose for one whole week. They had to support themselves for a week just by cadging off of people, stealing bananas, what have you.

That one is not quite as interesting as the middle-level manpower conference, but now that I remember what this is, this is more of a pleasure trip than anything else, even though he did make a couple of speeches. There *was* significance to the middle-level manpower thing.

(Interruption)

That was for the [Jamaican] Independence Day ceremonies. There are more stories in connection with that. Adam [Clayton Powell] and I, of course, were old friends; I'd covered him in the House. This was the official Independence Day; it was

really great to see that Sassenach flag go down. But the thing started becoming trouble almost right away. [Yoichi] Okamoto was with him taking pictures, and you know Oki, when Oki was after a picture he'd climb right into the women's washroom. And he was just swarming all over the princess--Princess Anne, I think it was--by getting shots of her. And at lunch, I think it was, some British major, a real Colonel Blimp type, said that "Your Vice President can't bring manners like that down here to a country that is not his." And I said, "Oh Major, I don't think it's yours either. Didn't I see your flag go down today?" Thousands of Irish patriots spoke right there.

(Laughter)

He--[Alexander] Bustamante--I sort of remember Bustamante's speech. Boy, he really had control over those people; they just worshipped him. That's the first time I ever saw a Rastafarian, you know, those people that do there hair up in heavy mud, so it looks sort of like a hat, and they go by you very gently, talking about going back to Africa or something like that.

The whole thing was just one great big feast of celebration for everybody but the British. I remember that night we were sitting in the hotel and he really started lapping it up, and at one point Adam turned to me and says, "George, he's fried to the gills."

(Laughter)

We got him to bed, then Adam and I sat up and had a few. But he really did a pretty good job down there, you know, he knew how to talk to those people and just his mere presence was all that was required. But he could go through a crowd shaking hands.

G: How did he get along with Adam Clayton Powell?

R: Oh, he and Adam understood each other perfectly. They got along perfectly all right. They were always fighting, of course, but that's all right. You know, Adam was a very strange character. He always had a little bit of trouble proving he was black. He was very light-skinned and a very handsome man, and his so-called black ancestry traced back through an Indian tribe in South Carolina that intermingled very heavily with blacks. Well, he was definitely descended from those Indians.

There was just a little touch of the con game in Adam, in fact, quite a little touch of the con game. I remember Vito Marcantonio once telling me that there was a committee to pay the minister's clothing bills; a committee to pay the minister's food bills; his father got ten thousand dollars as minister emeritus, which in those days was big money; Adam got twelve thousand as the minister. And he said, "He's got everything worked out now except a committee to pay the minister's phone bills, and he's working on that right now." But Adam was a delightful rogue. He was fun to be around. There was a--you know, when you were near him there wasn't any--in a sense he wasn't conning you at all. What he was saying was, "Look, I'm going to con you. Now watch me con you." What a character.

G: When you say he and LBJ were always fighting--

R: Oh, on something, you know, bills or what have you. They weren't fighting much; that was an exaggeration. But they'd generally take different stands on legislation. Adam was ultra-ultra-ultra liberal. They weren't particularly close, really, because he was over in the House and Johnson was in the Senate.

G: Then in late August there was the Middle East trip.

R: Yes.

G: And you went on that one.

(Interruption)

R: --in his pajamas and just in no mood to come on down and meet this honor guard. Well, somebody had to do something, so Lady Bird came down and was quite gracious. She really rescued the occasion. It wasn't much, but this honor guard had pulled out there; you can't just leave them alone.

Then, let's see now.

G: Now, there were several days of briefings in Washington before this trip, and you sat in on a lot of those briefings.

R: I was in on all of them.

G: Tell me first, anything about the briefings and the purpose of the trip.

R: The purpose of the trip was good will, period. The one thing where I suspect there may have been something else, but only suspect, was that both in Iran and in Turkey, he had meetings with the shah and with the president of Turkey, with nobody else present except probably an interpreter. Now what those meetings were about he never said, but I have heard hints over the years that one of the main purposes of his going over there was to inform both of them that we now had the satellite perfected to a point where we could really oversee what was happening in the Soviet Union, without having to send in spies or make those U-2 overflights or anything like that. That story has bounced back enough times that I have a feeling that it may be true. The rest of the trip was pure good will, nothing else, which is rather valuable.

My main impression of Lebanon was, I took one look at the crack troops and wished that armies all over the world could be like those crack troops. Most of those men couldn't see their toes because they didn't have x-ray eyes to go through their stomachs. If every army in the world were composed of men like that, we'd have peace.

(Interruption)

G: The troops?

R: Yes, I remember that crack honor guard of the President of Lebanon and thinking that armies like this were all over the world, we'd sure have peace. Those guys couldn't have fought their way out of a paper bag, which to me has always made it so strange when I read about the bitter fighting going on in Lebanon.

But we had sessions with both the vice president and the president. They had one of those screwball, gimcrack constitutions under which the president has to be a Christian and the vice president a Muslim.

For most of it, he went out and looked at housing projects. Damn, it's the story of my life: I've always wanted to see Baalbek, so Lady Bird and Liz Carpenter go to see Baalbek; I go look at a housing project. And when you see one housing project, you've seen them all, honest.

There really wasn't very much to the Lebanon thing. He had those meetings, as I said, with the President and the vice president and then we went on to--what was next?

G: I have a note here in the diary entry with regard to Beirut that he stopped and spoke to a crowd of workers who were working on a highway project--

R: Right.

G: --described how he had worked on a road-building crew when he finished high school--

R: Yes, I just remember that now.

G: --and that this made a strong impression on the crowd.

R: Oh, yes. That was the sort of thing he did well, and I'd forgotten it. But it was; it happened. You see, the Lebanon trip--I think it was just that Beirut was the first stop, frankly, and he didn't want to miss an Arab country; [that's] about all there was to it. I didn't have the feeling of this becoming serious. Let's see if there is anything else here that might . . . I remember, I was with him on that call on the president and the prime minister and really, they were just men that got together and talked because they were supposed to get together and talk.

Beirut, American University, nothing to add to it.

Tape 1 of 2, Side 2

G: In Tehran you had the feeling there was something more serious.

R: Everything was more serious. There seemed to be some purpose to it. And my God, the enthusiasm of those crowds--just incredible! They were surging up and down the street. I can recall one who was sort of pirouetting around the area and I asked him what the crowds were chanting. And he said they were chanting, "Hurray for the vice president; hurray for the vice president." That's a rough translation. Oh, by the way, he turned out to be Ali Baba, which I thought was great, to talk to Ali Baba on a street in Tehran. Now, there he did have a meeting with the shah--Oh, let's finish off that first day, though.

That first day he was so slow getting through the streets. He was getting out and shaking hands with the crowd and was so enthusiastic they had to cancel--oh no, that was

in Turkey. He was very, very late getting into the town and the--they put him up in a palace, one of the damndest things I've ever seen. Bess Abell took me into one of the rooms and my God, at ten o'clock at night that room was just as light as though there were big street lamps in it, because the walls were just covered with little crystal that was picking up the moonlight coming in through the window. It was incredible.

Of course, that's also the place some of the embassy staff took me to dinner in what they said was the best restaurant in Tehran, and I ate a broiled tomato. Oh God, I was sick. I was so awful sick. Ten o'clock that night, I was afraid I was going to die. By eleven I was afraid I was going to live. Whew! That stayed with me, too, for a couple of days. I was weak. But somewhere along the line he did have that private conference; that doesn't show up here. Well, it says, "To shah's palace for visit with shah and substantive talks." Oh, we visited the tomb of Reza Shah.

Now, Turkey is where the thing got so complex.

G: Anything on his interaction with the shah, other than your speculating that--

R: That speculation that I think is interesting. The . . .

G: What did he think of the shah?

R: I think he was rather impressed by him.

(Interruption)

Oh, yes, in Ankara we had this business of about a four-hour trip into town when it should have been thirty-five to forty minutes. And the funny part of it is that on the way in, two or three people--Bob Komer and a couple of others from the State Department--had warned him that he wasn't going to get the demonstrations from the

Turks that he did from the Persians, that the Turks were undemonstrative. And I think a great deal of this [was] he was whipping up that crowd just to rub their noses in it. For the whole rest of the trip he kept kidding Komer about "those undemonstrative Turks." And you know, when Turks demonstrate, they can demonstrate; oh, brother. And the result was that something had to be cancelled. Let's see. Yes, this laying the wreath at the tomb of Atatürk.

So the next day the schedule really got out of whack. Now, that wreath had to be laid at the Atatürk tomb, and what that did was to throw the whole rest of the schedule for the day off. And he kept shooting back and forth on different sides of the city; got mad as hell about it. He was with a press party at the hotel and they had him seated next to some Turkish woman who spoke no English, and there he was without an interpreter. As you can imagine, he had his problems with it. That was really his day to pop off; he was mad as all hell about anything and everything. I have a feeling that he may have been having some trouble with a kidney stone or something. He was unusually bad that day and again, I have that feeling that--not in his talk with the president, but in his talk with the prime minister--that he may have said something about that satellite. I don't know how you'd find out now. I think McGeorge Bundy or somebody might know.

Well, we went down to Izmir, which is really delightful; he spoke from the steps of the governor's palace, which looks about like this building. Went to the U.S. pavilion at the fair grounds, then to the airport, then to Istanbul. There was nothing outstanding there; it's just like it's accounted here. The only thing outstanding is that possibility of his talking to the Turkish prime minister.

Now, at Istanbul he went to that bazaar. Wow! Have you ever been in Turkey? The bazaar consists of shops, many of which are closed off by glass, and they are very close to each other. And they had the damnedest crowds following him through that bazaar. I was afraid the crowds were going to riot and smash windows and really hurt somebody. And the Secret Service was almost petrified with terror. But he got through it some way. He bought a lot of stuff there; I did too for that matter. But what I did, I paralleled him so that I wasn't within reach of the crowd at all. That surging crowd going through that bazaar is a major memory everybody has of the trip.

Now in Istanbul they had a rather peculiar arrangement. They had literally built a steel barrier on the corridor leading down to his room, so that he could have absolute privacy. And the press later wrote about it as the Berlin Wall. Of course they were just kidding, but it gave them kind of a problem because they had to go downstairs one flight to get an elevator. You see, this Berlin Wall cut off not only access to his room, it cut off access to the elevator on that floor. So the press was on the same floor and [if] they were going someplace, they'd have to go out, walk down a flight and then get the elevator.

G: Why did he do this?

R: I don't know whether he did it or whether the Secret Service did it on their own. But the main thing I remember is that he really was in a foul mood. And in effect, almost everybody took out that day. Lady Bird and Liz went up to visit some elaborate harem up in the Bosphorus. I went out to do some sightseeing; I've always wanted to see St. Sophia and the Blue Mosque, which I did. We just sort of left him and Mary Margaret alone in the hotel, and he seemed to get some of the meanness out of his system. I'm

almost certain that a kidney stone was bothering him at that point, because his temper was never placid under any set of circumstances, but it was unusually bad that day.

G: Was there anything in particular that irritated him?

R: Everything irritated him. Opening his eyes irritated him. Closing his eyes irritated him. The phone ringing irritated him. (Laughter) The phone not ringing irritated him. That was one of the days that reminds me of that old story about the man that says, "I'm going home now and if dinner is not on the table, I'm going to bawl my wife out for being late. And if it is on the table, I ain't gonna to eat it." That was one day.

"Sent Juanita, Yolanda and Marie on a shopping expedition to the bazaar." He had already bought a lot of stuff himself there.

Oh, Nicosia--first time they had ever flown the Cypriot flag. An interesting sidelight, by the way, is that the Cypriots didn't have a national anthem. And so you get into this customary thing, the exchanges of national anthems. They had a band there that could play "The Star Spangled Banner," but all the band could do for the Cypriots was to play some old British bugle calls. There was one thing--oh, "Drove the car to city on roads covered with laurel branches, showered with jasmine and other petals, got out of the car five times to shake hands and exchange greetings with people along the roadway into town." I remember that, because its important. Oh, your notes don't even come close to the reality of that occasion.

G: Tell me about it.

R We started out on this trip around town, before going to the parliament, and first we went to Atatürk Square. Now, I don't know if you're aware of the fact that somewhat less, just

a little bit less than 20 per cent of the Cypriot population is Turkish and the other 80 per cent is Greek; and I think there are one or two others in there too. But the only thing that prevents the Greeks from driving the Turks into the sea is the presence of the American fleet in the Mediterranean. What that means is, the United States is pretty popular with the Turks and pretty unpopular with the Greeks. Our first trip was to Atatürk Square, and boy oh boy, the Turks were out dancing in the streets, sacrificing sheep, cheering, yelling, playing those oboes that they have; just giving them one high welcome. We went from there to Venizelos Square: empty. Absolutely empty except for a young boy and a young girl sitting on a park bench. Have I told you this one before?

G: You may have, but go ahead.

R: And they were not interested in the Vice President of the United States going through. Hannibal could have gone through with a troop of elephants without getting those kids to look up, at that point.

And then we went through the Greek section and oh, it was awful: a few people walking on the streets, that would look up startled as we went by. I was traveling in the press car. We had a Turkish chauffeur and he was pointing out to us how few people there were. And at one point I saw a man standing on the street corner cheering, and I said thank God, he's got that at least. When he came closer it was pretty obvious from the accent that this was a guy who had gone to the United States as a young man and made enough that he could come back to Cyprus and live like a king.

Well, then we got to the parliament, and the Associated Press had a regular correspondent on the island, a very romantic kid, who pointed out to us all of the various

members of the Cypriot parliament and what they were, and five of them were communists. They have an arrangement there; they have a Rube Goldberg type of constitution, too, which guarantees that the Greeks and Turks will have the same split in parliament that they have in the population. And then the president is Greek and the vice president is Turkish, and the constitution enforces that. Well, there were twenty-five members, as I recall, of that parliament, and he made a talk and then went through shaking hands. He came to the leader of the communist faction, who shook hands before he thought. And when he realized what he was doing, he very quickly turned his back on Johnson.

Okay, then we went through the rest of Cyprus and the rest of this fluff, whatever it is: "Inaugurate a school lunch program. Discussion with Dr. [Fazil] Kutchuk. Presidential palace for lunch; To the airport, leaving for Greece."

The next morning, and this is in Athens, he called me into the hotel room and said, "George, bring that goddamn no-good lying bastard press in here. I want to tell them, these lies they're telling." I said, "What do you mean, Mr. President?" And he said, "Well, look; look at the papers." What the papers said was the same story that I would have written, or you would have written, or anybody with the sense that God gave little apples would have written: that he got a tremendous reception from the Turks, and the Greeks boycotted him. I said, "Well, for the love of God, Mr. President--and you know, he was vice president, [but] you always say, Mr. President--I said, "that's what happened. You could see it going through the town." He said, "Well, how do they know whether they were Greeks or whether they were Turks?" I said, "Look, we had a Turkish

chauffeur driving us around. He pointed all this out to us." And he said, "But how about--and then he went back to those villages he had gone through the day before, you see. In a little village, they'll always turn out for a fiesta of some sort. And what he was trying to do was to compare the session he had had with the Turks at Atatürk Square with the session he had had with the Greeks the day before in these little towns.

So then he challenged them on this communist leader turning his back, and I said, "Mr. President, I'm sorry, but I saw it and so did every other member of the press, so did everybody who was in there." And he said, "Well, how did they know he was the communist leader?" I said, "Mr. President, the Associated Press has a full-time correspondent on this island, an American who filled everybody in." Well, at least I got in there--the press would have thought he was crazy. Boy, I'll never forget that. So we agreed that we'd keep quiet about it. And that was that, and we left Cyprus. Again, I think the purpose of the Cypriot visit was just to let the Greeks and the Turks feel the weight of the United States. Quite obviously we were not going to permit the massacre of those Turks.

(Interruption)

There wasn't much to that first day in Athens. "I worked nearly all night with Bill Crockett"--on what? Greece really was more sightseeing than anything else. Let's see, the prime minister at that point was . . . oh, a conservative. Let's see, what's his name [Konstantinos Karamanlis]? The prime minister at that point was relatively conservative. And I remember that the embassy was very much worried that he was going to lose out to [Georgios] Papandreou in the next election. By the way, he came back a couple of years

later and they were very much worried that Papandreou was going to lose out to somebody. I have never taken too seriously embassy judgments on who's our best friend since then, but I wish I could think of the Prime Minister's name because it would help with the story. There's a rather cute story involved. Oh well.

At the end of the session he had with the prime minister, he was standing up in a jovial mood and he said, "You know, Mr. Prime Minister, you're the kind of man I'd go to the well with." I don't know how the Greek interpreter got around that, but he did. Then he said, "You know, this agreement reminds me of a Mother Hubbard. It covers everything and touches nothing." Well, some Americans that spoke Greek told me the interpreter got around that one all right by making some sort of an allusion to Fatima's veil. But then he goes ahead and he says, "Well, Mr. Prime Minister, you got my britches. I need a drink." I saw a strange look come over the face of the interpreter. He said something in Greek and a strange look came over the face of the President--Makarios--no, Makarios was that archbishop. Americans who spoke Greek, they were just convulsed in laughter. The way it had come out in Greek was, "Mr. Prime Minister, my pants are missing; I need alcohol."

(Laughter)

Those Texas idioms really got them. Now, let's see. We went to Thessaloniki, which was a damned interesting trip. But there's nothing there that isn't here.

G: Okay.

R: Then we went to Rome. "Met by [Italian Prime Minister Amintore] Fanfani." There really wasn't much to any of this stuff with all the prime ministers and what have you in

Rome. "Went down to Naples," which was more to his liking.

G: Why did he like Naples?

R: Because Neapolitans really turn out and they jump up and down, scream and yell and shout, whereas Romans--hell, they've seen Caesar. They've seen Hannibal; they've seen popes. Why should they care about a vice president? About the only crowd we had that applauded in Rome were some embassy wives that were put up together and stood on the street corner to clap as he went by. Down in Naples--oh boy! And down in Naples he had that general as a translator. He's now a diplomat, one of our representatives to the United Nations: General--he speaks about ten languages, fluently. What the hell was his name? But I remember Johnson making a speech to some shipyard workers and the general was translating. The general was giving it this and giving it that; I'm convinced that most of the shipyard workers thought the general was the vice president of the United States.

(Interruption)

In Greece we had picked up a diplomat named Outerbridge Horsey. Oh, brother. I took one look at Outerbridge and I knew this was going to be trouble, because he looked exactly like a *Chicago Tribune* caricature of a cookie-pushing, waist-coated diplomat. Talked something like it, too--spoke beautiful Italian. So Outerbridge went with him to a gallery; he was going to buy some paintings. And he came across a real beauty. Johnson's taste was excellent when he relied upon it, but almost any con man could sucker him on works of art. When he just let his own desires come through, the man really had excellent taste. And he stopped in front of a painting that is still down at the

Ranch, or was the last time I was there: a nude on her side, back to the audience, a volcano beyond her and a soft tropic rain falling, and the artist had painted her as the essence of femininity, you know, sloping shoulders, enormous hips, that sort of thing. And Johnson says, "Outer, how much do they want for that?" So Outer, whose Italian was beautiful, said, "They want two thousand dollars for it, Mr. Vice President." He said, "Tell the artist that if he'll take fifty pounds off her ass I'll pay his price." That is the only time in my life I have ever seen a man literally turn red, up from the collar. I know he did it deliberately to shock Outerbridge, but he did buy the painting because, as I said, the last time I was down at the Ranch it was there. And it was good.

G: Was the painting modified?

(Laughter)

R: No, no. He knew what he was doing.

The visit to the Pope, that was quite a little trip. He and Mrs. Johnson--let's see, were both Lynda Bird and Luci on that trip?

G: I think just Lynda.

R: That's what I think, too. Well, they had a private audience with the Pope. Then the Pope came out to see the rest of us. Well, the first man that he ran into was Sergeant Glynn, who was Johnson's valet.

G: Paul Glynn?

R: Yes, and he introduced Sergeant Glynn, and the Pope said, "You know, I was a sergeant once. That's why I became pope. I discovered I could never be an officer, so I left the army and joined the priesthood." Then he was introduced to me as a confidential

assistant and he said, "Ah, I know what that means. I was confidential assistant to a bishop once. I know who does the work and who gets the credit." Then he was introduced to Mary Margaret and Marie Fehmer and he said, "Mr. Vice President, you've been flying around the world with these angels?" You know, the man was really marvelous. His face was all wrinkled; it looked like the next wind would blow him away, but there was youthfulness to him. You got the impression of a really youthful soul with a sense of humor, a little sense of mockery at himself. It was one of the most enjoyable afternoons I ever spent. We'd all brought various things, of course, which the Pope had blessed. A quick tour of the Vatican, and we were off. Now--

G: There was at some point an earthquake--

R: Now, wait a minute, there is something--oh, I hope I am not mixing up the trip to Italy at the end of the Middle Eastern trip and the trip to Italy at the end of the around-the-world trip. I don't think so. I don't think so, but I could be. This says we went back through Shannon. I think I've got the trips right, but I'd like to be sure.

G: There was an earthquake in--

R: Yes, I thought I'd go into that next. There was an earthquake in Iran, and what he wanted to do was to load an airplane with relief supplies and fly on back, which would have been very dramatic. But the thing got cancelled, because I think it was a general feeling that it would have been more of a nuisance to have a vice-presidential party and all the Secret Service and everything else; that the damage they'd do just by getting in the way would outweigh anything they could bring into Tehran.

G: Was the decision made in Washington?

R: I'm not sure; I think so. In fact, I'm almost positive it was. I wish I could double-check. No, I think that I've got it right. But if you have any crosscheck you can make, you better be sure that it's not the round-the-world trip.

G: Then you flew to Shannon?

R: Yes. There really wasn't anything to that, just stopping, the usual shopping and stuff you do in Shannon.

G: Was the trip regarded as a success?

R: I think the State Department did. I'm not sure Johnson did.

G: Why not?

R: Johnson, I don't think he ever really believed in good will. I think that he thought that a trip was only successful if you had something to negotiate and negotiated it. I don't think there was much to negotiate here. If there was anything, it was in Turkey and in Iran. I myself, I thought it was an excellent trip. He handled himself well. The people turned out for him. You know, the peculiar thing about Johnson [was] he always did much better in underdeveloped countries or undeveloped countries than he did in the highly developed countries, always.

G: Why was that?

R: I don't know, but he could talk to peasants in India and they understood him. He knew how to talk so that peasants could understand him. He was great with those shipyard workers in Naples, but very poor in speaking to people in Rome. He was great talking to those crowds in Tehran and in Ankara, but a couple of years later he was, I thought, a miserable flop in the Scandinavian countries. Boy, he really loused that up.

G: The next two items I have: Kennedy's trip to Houston in September when he spoke at Rice and toured the space facilities there, do you--?

R: Kennedy's trip? I don't remember much about it.

G: Then you've got, there was--September 19, evidently some confusion with regard to a commitment that LBJ had made or not made to speak at the Ohio State Convention. Any recollection?

R: None.

G: Then his work on the Commission on the Status of Women. Anything about that?

R: That never got very far. I think because, as I recall--what was the date there?

G: September 24.

R: What year?

R: 1962.

R: I was under the impression that something had happened to break up the work of that committee. At first I thought maybe it was the assassination [and] his having to become president. But something happened, and I don't know what it is. I know he never did much with it. The one to talk to about that would be Liz Carpenter, but there was nothing unusual about it. Let's see, Houston Harte; Ed Harte; Albert Jackson; Larry Provence; George Brown--the publisher; Amon Carter, Dr. Lamb; Jim Oiler I don't know; Charlie Gibson I don't know; Whittenberg's a publisher; Phil North I don't know; Phil Stevens I don't know; Ed Ray--was Ed there?

G: *Chronicle*, maybe.

R: No, never the *Chronicle*. I first got to know Ed when he was with the San Antonio--not

the *Light*, the other paper, the *News*.

G: *Express News*?

R: He later went to Tennessee. Ed Ray; Dwight Allison--I know him. Bill Hobby; of course that's Oveta's son. Sam Kinch, Fort Worth; Frank Mayborn was Texas somewhere.

G: I think Temple or Killeen, that area.

R: Temple, that's right. And Charlie Green was Austin. It was just a dinner. Everybody enjoyed themselves.

(Interruption)

--which Sargent Shriver and Bill Moyers put an awful lot of stock in it. I never thought it had the potential that they did.

G: This was a manpower conference?

R: Yes. The thesis was that in order to develop, these underdeveloped countries had to develop what they call middle-level manpower, meaning auto mechanics--not high-rated technicians but people that could fix things, people that could support an industrial society. And this conference was supposed to be an effort to bring together underdeveloped nations at one spot and talk about the problem. As far as I was concerned it wasn't much more than a junket, and I don't think it was much more than that for Johnson either. I don't know that anything really grew out of the conference. I know I had plenty of time on my hands down there--very little to do, because I had already written a speech for him.

G: Okay.

(Interruption)

R: No, I don't remember the Stetson hats in that connection. That was a common ploy of his. It was just sort of an enjoyable occasion.

I remember this cattle auction that LBJ and [A. W.] Moursund went to--well, I went to it, too. I remember this business in Miami with Claude Pepper and Dante Fascell. I don't think Pepper was a senator then. You have him there, "Greeted by Senator Claude Pepper."

G: Oh.

R: I don't think he was.

G: He wasn't.

R: Well, there's nothing to add to any of this.

(Interruption)

What's this "Crown Prince Olivia" business? Well, there's something wrong here then. Of course, this doesn't mention the Cuban missile crisis at all, which is strange, because what I remember doesn't quite fit in with that.

G: Okay.

R: When we were flying over there to Hawaii, LBJ came over and sat down next to me in the plane and told me confidentially about the missiles having been found in Cuba, and that he might have to leave any minute, but they were trying to make all the engagements in Hawaii that they possibly could in order to avoid a panic until they decided what to do about the missiles. Now, that kind of put me in a funny spot because what it meant was that I'd have to answer all the press' questions if he just suddenly disappeared, which would be very difficult for me to do.

As I recall, we went to Maui and had that luau, which was quite a luau; it was held in the Armory. And he made a speech. Then I think he went back to Oahu for one final speech. It wasn't the final speech scheduled, but it was the final speech for that night. And he went directly, as I recall, from that speech to the air base where I thought they flew him in some sort of superfast jet fighter plane first to San Francisco, then to Washington. I, and I think it was Leonard Marks, followed him commercial until we got to San Francisco where some air force plane picked us up and flew us to Washington.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

R: I've forgotten exactly when they did announce the facts about the missiles, because LBJ was all tied up with the White House when I got there. I said Leonard Marks and I, as I recall--I don't know why Leonard was there--flew back. And by the time I got to Washington I think Kennedy had already laid down his ultimatum to [Nikita] Khrushchev, and Khrushchev had finally withdrawn those missiles that were on their way over. That's my recollection of it.

(Interruption)

No, they wouldn't have to make any plan. The standard plan is always in existence. They had a great big mountain there that they were going to put the President and the Vice President and Secretary of State and other needed members--

G: What was LBJ's mood during this time? Apprehension?

R: I'd say apprehension and a little depressed, a little depressed.

G: Did he think we were at fault in letting the missiles get set up there, or that we were taking the proper course in the blockade?

- R: We didn't let them get set up there. I think you're thinking of the missile bases, yes.
- G: That's true.
- R: But not the missiles.
- G: Yes.
- R: There weren't any missiles down there.
- G: He didn't know enough at that point. Later on I think it turns out that we were not at fault, that what had happened is that the sites had been constructed largely during the period when visual contact with the earth was just too obfuscated.
- R: I never heard any critical music out of it. I don't think there was any.
- G: Did he agree with the course that Kennedy was deciding upon, or did he advocate bombing or--?
- R: You never could be quite sure about LBJ and what he had urged Kennedy to do, because as a rule he wouldn't tell you, his thesis being that a president is entitled to make up his own mind without having the vice president put heat on him. So again I will never be quite sure just what stands he took in his private conferences with Kennedy.
- (Interruption)
- R: --Billie Sol [Estes] at all. Cliff Carter did. And Cliff had actually gotten Billie Sol to pay for a couple of those radio tapes out in West Texas. But I think that--I don't think they knew each other. My wife thought that she saw Billie Sol at a party out at The Elms, but she couldn't be sure because she only knew Bill[ie] Sol from looking at the pictures of him in the paper. Cliff Carter knew him. Cliff Carter was literally the only one in the office that did. When the case first started to break, I thought I ought to find out

something about him, so I questioned every staff member in the audience. Not one would admit that they'd ever known Billie Sol.

G: Did LBJ feel that he was being identified unjustly with--?

R: Oh, sure. Also with Bobby Baker. However, with Bobby Baker his efforts were a little more ludicrous. With Billie Sol, he was absolutely right. I don't think he could have or would have recognized Billie Sol. I went through all of the office files. All I could find were a few letters in which we acknowledged his gift of a couple of melons or something like that, and the--oh, something to do with the *braceros*, I've forgotten what, in which Billie Sol wrote Johnson a letter and got a very routine answer. And I think that what happened is that people just changed the first two names to Billie Sol and then went through the base and broke out all of the scheme things [?]. I guess because--well, where was I? I was on Billie Sol, wasn't I? I had one of those little blips that I get every once in a while when I'm--I think it's the end of the peaking period on my insulin. Let's see, what was my point?

G: That really he didn't know Estes very well and that the correspondence was very routine.

R: The correspondence was terribly routine. Billie Sol had written him a couple of times about *bracero* problems and he'd gotten strictly routine return letters, and strictly routine thank yous for cases of watermelon. That's about it.

Bobby Baker, on the other hand, he got really ridiculous about Bobby Baker. He kept trying to deny that Bobby was his *protégé*. Well, that was just stupid. Everybody knew that Bobby was his *protégé*.

G: Why did he do that, do you know?

R: For a man who could show as much guts as he could under certain circumstances, he was very timorous under others. And when he came under any kind of a verbal attack, his impulse was to circle the wagons or to dig a hole, crawl in it and pull the hole in after him. And he tried to separate himself as much as he could from Bobby Baker, but he couldn't do it. And Abe Fortas was a brilliant lawyer, but when it came to public understanding, Abe was a babe in the woods. Abe was the one that came up with this: "Bobby Baker wasn't my *protégé*; after all, all the Senate Democrats elected Bobby secretary of the majority." Well, for the love of God, they all elected him because LBJ told them to go ahead and elect Bobby.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview XXI