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JACQUELINE COCHRAN ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW III  
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JACQUELINE COCHRAN

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INTERVIEW III

DATE: May 25, 1974

INTERVIEWEE: JACQUELINE COCHRAN

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

PLACE: Ms. Cochran's residence outside Indio, California

F: How did you get started on this series of visits? Did he just call you one time, or were you in town, or--?

C: I'm trying, myself, to get this just as accurate as I can.

(Interruption)

F: When you first started on these visits, were you mainly concerned with the development of the war in Vietnam, or--?

C: Primarily, yes. One thing that happened--I was in Washington. I told you about the--when he was vice president, about giving the wings to the X-15 boys. Remember?

F: Yes.

C: Did I tell you that?

F: I don't remember that.

C: Well, now this is interesting. This was really--I started seeing quite a lot of Lyndon, frequently, starting at that time. I went to Washington on other business; I'm on the board of George Washington University, for one thing, and I'm constantly being asked to do things in the Defense Department, as--you'll see the evidence of it today.

F: Yes.

C: And one thing and another, so I decided that I was going to see if I could get the Vice President--he's the titular head of the space program--to present the astronaut wings to the men who had exceeded fifty miles in the air. And I think the X-1, first, X-1A, and the X-15 are the three primary aircraft that made space possible in this country, from our research point of view.

Now, one of these men I barely knew. I don't think I'd have known him if I had met him in the street. But I had read the profiles of all their flights. And I was in Washington, and I telephoned, and I think it was Mrs. [Evelyn] Lincoln--which was such a funny name for a secretary; I got a kick out of it. I called and I said my name, and that I hoped--was hopeful that I could have a very, very short interview with the Vice President, a meeting with the Vice President.

F: We're talking about Vice President Johnson, now.

C: Yes. And she said, "Well, of course, Miss Cochran! We've all heard your name," which was almost startling to me. And she said, "When would you like to see the Vice President?" I said, "Well, at his convenience, of course." I said, "I'm going to be here this many days, and I will be available for everything except for these appointments, which I would not care to break, if I can avoid it." And I said, "One of them I just can't break. I'm going to go to this meeting, because I'm on the board and I think I should be there."

Well, she said, "Just a minute! I think the Vice President would want to talk to you." And I said, "Oh, no, I wouldn't want to bother him." Lyndon came on the phone! And he said, "What do you mean, you get in town and you don't call me?" You know, this beautiful, friendly, warm, lovable way.

F: Kind of teasing.

C: Yes, really. And I said, "Well, I called to have an appointment, not to catch you on the phone, Mr. Vice President." And he said, "Lyndon, to you!" And I said, "Well, all right, Lyndon."

And he said, "Well, come right on over!" I said, "I can't! I'm in bed." He said, "Good! I wish I were there with you."

F: (Laughter) Yes.

C: In this completely joking, not in any personal way, nothing at all--it might have been a father kidding you, or something. Anyway--

So he says, "All right, as soon as you are ready, you just come right on over." I said, "Oh, you're not busy these days, as vice president!" I couldn't help but get the dig in, because I was kind of mad that he had given up the great position in the Senate to be vice president. I think many of his friends felt that way, and certainly Sam Rayburn.

So I immediately got up, and had some breakfast, and dressed, and went over, and when I got into the outer office, I had never seen so many people in my life in one outer office! There were so many out there that some of them were standing. I thought they were having a convention.

F: This was in the EOB?

C: Yes, it was in the--wherever the--

F: The Executive Office Building.

C: --the Vice President has his office. I don't remember where it was. To answer your question, I don't remember. But, wherever it was, I went to his office. It was very spacious, and he had lots of room.

I didn't even sit down! One of the secretaries came over--now, whether it was Mrs. Lincoln or not, I don't know. And she says, "The Vice President will see you right away." Well, I want you to know, he just walked out of that office with this man, and gave him a pat on the back, and walked over and put his arm around me, and we walked into the room together. And everybody looked a little astonished--including me, of course. It was the first time I saw him when he [was] Vice President.

And he started talking, and asking how Floyd was, and how was I, and did I get in town very often? I said, "Oh, yes, I get here quite often." He said, "Well, I told you to call me any time you ever come in town!" I said, "Oh, I can't do that! For heaven's sakes, you're a very busy man, and important things to do," and--so, I said, "Well, I've come here to ask you to do something that I think should be done." My word of honor, he said, "Well, whatever it is, I'm sure it will be honorable, and not personal." That's the truth. "And I'll do it, if I can." I said, "But you haven't heard what it is!" You see, I was astonished his staff didn't want to know what I wanted to see him about. They didn't ask me, and I didn't tell them. I said, "Well, quickly, I'll tell you what it is. I want you to give astronaut wings to these fellows. I think they've made space--our space program--moved it way up the pole considerably, with their research, and their research flying. And although they may not--nobody has decided what space is yet." He said, "They haven't?" I said, "No, sir. We don't know what space is. It has not been defined."

And I said, "I think these men deserve it." He said, "All right. Now, you--right out there, go out there with my staff, and you tell them just exactly what you want me to do, and I'm going to do it." See, that was something he could do. He didn't go into the

details, he didn't question the accuracy, he didn't say, "I'll talk to the chief of staff," or "I'll talk to the head of the space program." He just said, "I'll do it."

Well, it was pretty astonishing, you know. And, you see, the X-15 program came under NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], which used to be NACA [National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics]. And so I said I would like for it to be done when he would have the time to present the wings to them, and so forth. And I said, "I presume it should be cleared with their chiefs of staff"--you know, they're not all the same branch of the military. And she said, "I don't think that's important, or necessary." I said, "Well, that's fine with me! I still think"--I said, "Do I have permission to tell them that I've done this? I sort of didn't go through anybody!"

F: (Laughter) Yes.

C: I said I had talked a little bit with Dr. [Hugh L.] Dryden; that's the only person with whom I had discussed it. And I didn't know it was going to be this easy to do it. We were both in agreement. So, I said, it wasn't entirely about myself, in this decision, or requesting this honor for these fellows.

I was back there for another meeting, and I tied my meeting in with the day that he set to come over to this beautiful room, wherever it was; I don't remember. It made a platform, I know--in the room.

F: In the White House, you mean?

C: No, no, in another building. I don't know where it--I think some of the State Department buildings. I'm not sure.

F: Yes, possibly.

C: Well, I couldn't tell you the building right now, no way, except it was not the White House. But they had built a small platform.

Dr. Dryden and I were on the meeting, and we got late. And then we hit some traffic we didn't expect. And we were just so horrified, because the Vice President had a record of being pretty prompt and on-time for things. But, by the grace of God, he had just gotten up on the platform when Dr. Dryden and I burst in, and the room was just packed.

Oh--I had also requested that they permit the wives to fly back with these men in military aircraft. Because most military wives never get to see anything, or do anything, and they can't afford it financially, and they're not allowed to fly on military aircraft unless it's ordained by the powers that be, or directed. I gave a dinner for them. It was in August, I know; the weather was very hot. It was very difficult to find any room in Washington that was open. The Sulgrave Club was closed, and everything was closed--which they usually are in August, in Washington. And the Statler Hotel gave me the bar, and closed it for the night, for me to have a dinner in it! Can you imagine? It was one of these small bars, on the main floor--a very attractive room. And [they] arranged the dinner, and I called Lady Bird and I said, "Gee, it would be so wonderful if you and Lyndon could come by, and speak to these people." They had an official dinner that night, and they came and spent an hour with them. I mean, it shows you the kind of person he is.

So, anyway, when I got there, and we were late, and we were on this little platform they had built, Dr. Dryden and I, and Mr. [James] Webb, who was the director of NASA, and--oh, some other dignitaries; I don't know who they were. And, again, the

Vice President put his arms around me, and gave me a big smooch, in front of the whole room full of people. It was always that same thing. I guess it was a carryover from when he was sick.

And I was back there, oh, for something that he invited me to; I've forgotten what it was. It was not--it was some kind of a formal thing; I don't even remember it. And every time I'd see him--"You call me when you come to town." And, of course, I didn't.

Well, I didn't see him for a long time then. And he became president. He became president on his own steam, too. It was after that, really, that I started seeing a lot of him. And I had been in communication with "Bozo" McKee, General [William F.] McKee, who was the head of FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. They even made a law to permit him to draw two military--two government pays at once. And he was in to see the President. And my telephone rang, and I picked it up, and somebody in the White House said, "Miss Cochran, the President would like to speak to you!" I thought it was president of George Washington or something! I said, "You mean, *the* President?" She said, "Yes!" And--a big noise on the phone. He said, "What's the idea of coming in town and not calling me? I told you to call me!"

F: (Laughter) Back on that again.

C: What?

F: Back on that theme again!

C: If he said that to me once--I don't think I'd exaggerate--he said it two dozen times to me.

So he said, "Can you come here in the morning, eight o'clock?" I said, "Well, sure, I can." I said, "I was planning on leaving this afternoon, but I'll wait over. I'll be very happy to come in and see you." And I was there at eight o'clock. He took me in the

Oval Office and gave me something that I can't find--it was a little relief, a plaque, a wonderful head of him sculpted on it. I've just got to find mine. It's somewhere packed in all these boxes. And I teased him about it.

We sat and talked, and he said, "Come in here, I want to show you something."

And--I called that the clothes closet. It was this room, off the oval room, with a desk--the room was not that small; it was probably about fourteen by sixteen, but it was--seemed small.

F: Definitely small, and--

C: You've been in it, obviously.

F: It had no window.

C: That's right, except I got a window put in it.

F: Yes, more like an anteroom.

C: I said I got a window put in it.

F: Yes. We'll get into that in a minute, and see how.

C: I just said I wouldn't sit in the damn room anymore if they didn't get a window cut in there. It's not healthy anyway.

F: So--

C: There was a window cut. On the Rose Garden. And drapes put up.

F: Yes. That's good!

C: Well, it improved the room immensely. It didn't take that much wall space. And I think it probably had been put there as a cloakroom, at one time.

F: Kind of like an oversized cloakroom, really.

C: Well, yes, well, look at my clothes closet. Bigger than that, of course. But, I mean, it was--still, it's nice to have those big rooms.

So I sat down, and he said, "Now, what do you think of this?" And it had things to do with the war! And I said, "Do you want me to read it?" He said, "Sure, I want you to read it. I'll be back after a while." So, he left, and I sat there and I read the paper. But I didn't have anything before--I hadn't been on the--

F: No briefing, or anything like that.

C: --or in the meetings that brought the--brought up the subject.

F: Well, what were these, dispatches? Or were they Security Council sort of things?

C: No, this was from--oh, Lord, the man I dislike so.

F: [Robert S.] McNamara?

C: McNamara. And it was absolutely talking down to the President! It had a terrible tone to it. And it was just not right. It wasn't even right the way it was directed to him, I didn't think. Very, very well written, beautifully written. And it had to do with the war in Vietnam. He wanted the President--said, "I request you to order this, and I request you to order that." In other words, you'd sure as hell better not turn down my request! You know? "I want this man drawn out of Vietnam, and I want somebody else put in, and I don't want any backtalk from the White House!" I'm not saying--it didn't say *that*, but that's the--

F: That was the tone of it.

C: That was the tone of what the paper was all about. And, after about an hour, there was a bunch of stuff there that I read through--without any particular feeling of comprehension

about it, because I didn't--I just didn't know the pattern of--what had created all this.

And--

F: It's kind of like picking up something in a doctor's office when you're waiting time, and start reading.

C: Yes. Well, you wouldn't find that kind of--

F: No, I know.

C: --in a doctor's office, because these are very important papers. But, I said, "I don't understand this." He said, "Well, what don't you understand?" I said, "I haven't had sufficient background and briefing on what's led up to all of these things." I didn't have the courage to say to the President, "I think this has the wrong tone. Did it strike you that way? And I'd slap a man if I were a president"--I don't mean physically--"if I were president of the United States and I received from a subordinate"--

F: You'd like to remind him who was the President.

C: Yes, so would I. And he said, "You know, these educated boys, they think they're pretty smart, don't they?" And I said, "Well, Mr. President, you were in the navy." I said, "In the Senate days, you had to be exposed to what went on with the military services." And I said, "I don't know--you're the commander-in-chief, and theoretically call the shots. But, certainly, a commander-in-chief must delegate authority." They couldn't do it all themselves. It wouldn't be humanly possible.

And he said, "But I want to know what you think of this!" I said, "Well--Mr. President, I don't know whether this general should be taken out of Vietnam, and replaced by some other general, and I don't want any static from the White House." I said, "Is he referring to you, or is he referring to somebody else in the White House?" I

don't know whether Lyndon ever caught this before. He looked at me, and I said, "I just don't know enough about it to have any judgment."

Well, he said, "In other words, you don't like it." I said, "Not particularly." I said, "I don't know whether I like or dislike having these generals shifted around." You remember, they were shifted very often, in Vietnam. Do you remember that? There were an awful lot of shifts.

And then he'd just sit down and he'd talk. He must have talked then for thirty minutes about this war, the escalation of it, the hopelessness of it. And it was perfectly obvious, his personal distress over the whole thing. And, after all, he had inherited it. And that was before he fired Bobby Kennedy as attorney general, by the way, too. Because I came in for a session with Bobby Kennedy.

And--he was never asking my advice. I don't want to even leave the inference that he was, saying, "Do you think I'm doing the right thing," or "What is your opinion?" He would just talk on and on and on! I don't think he wanted any opinion. The only thing I can figure out [is that] he wanted a sounding block. He wanted to hear himself talk out loud, and think out loud.

Because I went in on another occasion, when he said, "I don't know what to do, or what I'm going to do about these--this Kennedy boy." He referred to him. I said, "You mean the one in the Senate, or the one in the attorney general's office?" And he laughed! Then he said, "I think you know the one I mean," just--quietly. And I said, "If you don't like him, why don't you fire him?" "Well," he said, "it's a little difficult to do." Now, this was before--I was in there before he even became president under his own steam, one of the times when he discussed him.

I'm just trying to say, as many times as I would go in there, I got to where I would call up [Jim] Jones--not always, or I would call Watkins--

F: [Marvin] Watson.

C: Watson--and I would say, "I am in town. You might tell the boss." I would never use the name over the phone. You never know in hotels who is listening in.

F: Yes.

C: But one of the truly unusual experiences I had--I had been in Washington. I had been there for three days. And I was flying my Lodestar home, and it was very, very, very precarious weather. It was late, and I was tired. And I stopped in Oke City to get a bite to eat, some hot soup, and to telephone Floyd and tell Floyd that I wouldn't be home, in all probability. And not to worry, have somebody leave a car out at the airport in case I change my mind. And so he said, "Operator 18 in Washington has been trying to get you."

F: Where's Oke City?

C: Oklahoma City.

F: Oh, I see.

C: All pilots refer to it as Oke City. I'm sorry! Oklahoma City. Isn't that funny? We always say Oke City.

I said, "Well, I'll call him." I looked around for a telephone booth and I couldn't find one. And it was one of these booths--one of these phones on the wall, with just two pieces of Plexiglas on each side. I went over and I called Operator 18. "Oh," she said, "oh, yes, Miss Cochran, just a minute." Apparently they must keep a crew of operators that handle all long-distance calls coming out of the White House. Because they always

take your name, all the detail. She didn't do it with me. It's very funny, that it was--because I have called for presidential appointments, even when Eisenhower was in--I've forgotten--well, I didn't call back on--yes, I did, I called back on a call with him once. I don't know whether it was Operator 18, though! Maybe they change the numbers with the presidents. I don't know.

But, nothing to it. "Oh, yes, Miss Cochran, we'll put you right through." And so it came through to one of the--I think Jones. He said, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm in Oklahoma City." He said, "You're all the way out there?" I said, "Yes, I'm in Oklahoma City." I said, "I'm on my way home." "Well," he said, "the President's very anxious to see you tomorrow morning." I said, "Well, I just can't come back in this weather tonight. It's impossible." I just didn't think it was that important, and it wasn't, really. And he said, "Let's coordinate watches. Big stuff. I think the Chief wants to talk to you."

And I said, "Well, I don't have any private place to talk here. I'm talking in a booth hanging on the wall. It's pretty public-looking." He said, "Why don't you get the airport manager and tell him you have to talk to the President." I'll swear this is true! I said, "Are you kidding? You must be nuts!" That's exactly the way I said it. I said, "You just don't do a thing like that. Good Lord! It would be in every paper in town!" Well, wouldn't it? Can you imagine me saying a thing like that?

I don't know whether he said, "You're going to have to talk to the President," but he said, "Surely they'll give you a private room to use." And I said, "I'm not a big shot! I'm a common ordinary citizen. And I wouldn't ask for it anyway. If I had a very, very serious emergency, I might go and ask for something, but not under these circumstances." And then you don't know who's going to listen in. I said, "No way!"

So, I said, "They go through a switchboard here at the airport," and I said, "Oh, no. You're nuts!" He said, "All right. You call back exactly"--when? Because I went in and ordered a bowl of soup, and I--in coveralls. And I went back and I called exactly on time--"just a minute." And he said, "Do you mind holding two or three minutes?" I said, "No."

F: Were you still calling from that hang-up booth?

C: There wasn't any place else to call from! There wasn't a single closed booth that I could find, in that lobby.

And so I called. He came on the phone. He said, "What's the idea of not letting me know when you're in town?"

F: Yes. (Laughter)

C: I said, "It's embarrassing to me, to telephone and say I'm in town." I said, "You know where I am." He said, "No, I never know where you are. Maybe I'm going to set you up and make you stay in Washington!" I said, "Oh, I don't think that would be very wise." I said, "I don't know of any service I could render that would justify it." Because I really was almost fearful that he would just order me to go to work!

F: Yes.

C: He said, "I could order you on active duty!" I said, "Oh, no, that wouldn't work out, I don't think." Now, he'd have had to have given some thought to this statement. But I said, "Really"--and I called no name, I just avoided saying anything--I said, "There isn't anything that I could contribute to your great responsibilities--I'm not trained for it--that would justify [it]." He said, "Well, don't you think I'm the one to judge that?" I said, "I wasn't judging you. I was judging myself, and the relation to your problems, and your"--I

said, "They are problems." He said, "Yes, I know it, damn it. You understand them, and you appreciate it."

So, again, it was like a child, seeking comfort, like your children did with a big old fat Negro woman. You know, a "take me on your shoulder and let me cry" attitude, because that's the only way I can figure this thing out. Because there was no other basis for it existing. And I wish--I'd just give anything if I knew the exact number of times that I went back there. But I don't think that I would exaggerate if I would say, for a five months' period, I was back there at least once every week or ten days. At least that.

F: You must have logged lots of hours personally.

C: Well, sometimes I took an airline, and sometimes I flew my own aircraft.

So, he said, "Well, how soon can you get back here?" I said, "You have the right to order me back any time you want to." I said, "I'll try to--I've got some responsibilities, and appointments, like anybody else that works. But I'll certainly suit your convenience." And he said, "Well, can you be back next Thursday?" It was like, you know, this was Wednesday or Thursday, and it was within the week. I said, "Yes, I'll be back." He said, "Just let me know. You get in at your own convenience, and you call up when you get here."

Then I would call up, they'd have me come over, and I would sit down in this clothes closet. And maybe he was out in the oval room, receiving all kinds of people. And he would leave a stack of papers for me to read. I know, on one of the trips when I went back there, there was a great to-do over the Haiphong raid. And he talked to me three hours about [this]. And I'm going to get into the details on that. Because this was a

very specific--and I don't think I ever--no, it was the longest session that I had at any time while I was going back.

(Interruption)

F: The bombing of Haiphong.

C: Well, the time that I went back, when I had been in Oklahoma City, was not the time we discussed it. But there were a lot of these--

F: It set up the pattern for [inaudible].

C: There were a lot of these plans coming over his desk. You'd just be amazed at the numbers of them that he would have me read!

Well, now, I did have an amazing setup to World War II. But he was never--I just want to emphasize this over and over--seeking my opinion, or my advice, or my counsel.

F: He was educating you to the point where you could understand what he was--

C: Going through.

F: --talking about.

C: And then he would sit down and start to talk. "And I don't think they should do this! And I think that--if they did it this way!" But he wasn't looking for an answer! I just sat and listened. Is this incredible to you?

F: He talked through all the alternatives.

C: Oh, many times, he'd have them--and then he'd say, "I have so much trouble with McNamara." And McNamara, and McNamara! And on one of the times--

F: Did you get to feeling McNamara kind of bugged him?

C: Whew, that's the understatement of the year! I almost had a feeling he was afraid of the man. Now, I never knew McNamara. I met him once or twice, but I didn't know him at

all. You know, I just said "How do you do" to him--kind of thing, or saw him at a reception, this kind of thing. But he was absolutely--well, you surely have seen some of the papers that passed between them, haven't you?

F: Yes. I've had the feeling that--

C: Didn't you have the feeling he was almost dictatorial to the President?

F: I had the feeling that Johnson backed up to nobody except maybe McNamara, and in McNamara's case, he did defer.

C: That's exactly what he did. And he'd talk [inaudible].

F: The one man who was smarter than he was, or something. Or he was afraid he was.

C: Well, McNamara was delighted to give that impression to people. Now, I got to know McNamara very well through some of our--a couple of our mutual--or, rather, somebody who knew him; I don't know whether they were friends or not. And people whom I knew very well. And Bozo McKee was one of them.

So, he was a pretty overbearing--in other words, in a room, there was only one opinion, and that was McNamara's. And you got that impression in reading papers he'd send through to the President. I would go in, and maybe there would be four or five different things for me to read, that I would have no background on, no connection with, didn't even understand what some of them were--because you had to have some backup, to know what's going on, to even understand it, much less have an opinion. And, again, I don't think it was to seek my opinion. It was to seek someone whom he could talk to. And maybe Lady Bird had heard him out. I don't know. Or--

F: Well, plus the fact that she didn't have the time to read position papers, or--

C: She didn't?

F: Well, I don't--maybe she did. She, you know, was busy being First Lady, and that was probably pretty full-time itself.

C: Maybe so.

F: And she didn't have the experience.

C: Well, *I* didn't have the experience of the President's problems, either, and I didn't--

F: No, but you had some understanding of the tactics of planes.

C: Well, yes, I did.

F: And performance of military units, and so on.

C: Well, I went back, and there was nothing timely about this, after the call that I got in Oklahoma City. And even Floyd was getting almost annoyed with him. He said, "My Lord, why don't you just go to Washington and stay, and go to work? You're back and forth"--and he would call me on the phone, quite often, and talk to me for a long time on the phone.

F: Well, every trip back and forth is the equivalent of a day lost.

C: A day and a half, two days out of your life! You get tired.

F: I mean, just pure travel time, though.

C: I know. Just a loss.

F: Four or five hours each way, and--

C: He said, "They're wearing you out! You keep going back to Washington--'I've got to go to Washington again, tomorrow,' canceling everything, changing all your plans." He said, "You need to go there and stay, or stop--you know, flitting back and forth."

So, one day--oh, this was in the spring, I know. Which year I don't remember, but it still was before Haiphong. Because many things predate Haiphong, in my meetings

with him. I had spoken before a very unique group of people in Santa Barbara. They have one meeting a month, for about six or seven months a year, and they have a doctor, and the baker, and the lawyer, and the everybody there.

F: Candlestick maker.

C: Yes. And it's not World Affairs Council, whatever it's called, but it's called some big fancy name. And I think I was the first woman they had up there to speak. I went up and talked to this group, and I told them I thought General [Curtis] LeMay would make a very fine speaker. And--because Vietnam was so hot and heavy, and he was so bitter on so many of these things, and he presented himself extremely well, and he was so right! Either get out--put up or shut up, in other words! And I felt that very strongly, but, believe it or not, I would be in with the President maybe for three hours, reading papers and listening to him, or two hours, an hour and a half--and go back over the next morning, and sit for another hour, and he would run in, talk to me a little bit, go see somebody else. And I think that to put all the actual physical time together that he talked to me would be fifty hours. Without any exaggeration.

And--so, anyway, the people who ran this outfit, at Santa Barbara, said they'd just like to have him. Could I persuade him? I said, "I have no idea," so--Curt said, "I'd be delighted to go and talk." And they wanted me to introduce him, and I said, "I really think Mr. Odlum could introduce him better than I can." I think it would be very fitting. They were good friends. And it just seemed better.

F: Yes.

C: So we were all on the--naturally, on the dais, at this luncheon, when a man came up and, in the loudest whisper I have ever listened to in my life--I'm sure you could have heard it

in the back of the room--"The White House is calling you!" I said, "Well, the White House can't talk." I was so annoyed--and sometimes I'll give a little quirk like that; I shouldn't really do it. And I said, "I know dozens of people there." And he said--he said, "Probably the President is calling you!" And I said, "Oh, no. No, I know many people in the White House, many newspaper people too." He said, "No." I said, "Tell him I'll call back after lunch."

He came back and said, "[Would] you get on the phone now?" I said, "Well, you tell whoever's saying that I'm not getting on the phone now. And I will return the call after lunch." Well, I looked--there was no place in the world [to speak] except a real public telephone!

F: (Laughter) Yes.

C: So, the luncheon was over. Floyd and I returned to the hotel. The maids were with us. And the manager met me at the door, and he said, "Miss Cochran, the White House is trying to get you. Shall I get them on the phone for you?" Isn't this amazing, the way--how impressed people are.

F: Oh, yes.

C: And, you know, I never have been--I don't mean that I don't have proper respect and proper awe of important things. But I've never been impressed with things like that. Have you?

F: No, but I was interested in watching the reaction--the time I spent around there, there wasn't anybody just mention that "the White House says," or "the White House wants," how they would jump to attention.

C: Yes! And I said, "Oh, no, it has no importance. I'll take care of it after a while." I went to my room, and you never know if you're bugged or not in this world, and I just whispered, "Floyd, I'm going out to a public telephone, and see what it's all about." He said, "I wish they'd leave you alone! You're just doing too much of this." He said, "You're wearing yourself out." [Inaudible]

And so I went, and it was hot as blazes! For Santa Barbara, that's unusual. But it was not hot, really, but--it's very humid there. And this telephone booth was facing southwest, and it was really boiling. So, I called Operator 18, and one of the boys came on the phone and said, "Miss Cochran, the President wants to see you tomorrow morning at eight o'clock." I said, "That's not humanly possible! I'm in Santa Barbara, California." And he acted as though he didn't know where Santa Barbara was. I said, "You'll have to send *Air Force One* for me." Just making a joke! He said, "Well, we certainly will set up a plane for you. We'll call the military, and have them set up a plane." I said, "Don't be ridiculous! What does he want to see me about?" He said, "Well, I don't ask the President what he wants to see you about. He said he wants you here tomorrow morning at eight o'clock." And I said, "Well, would you be kind enough to tell the President I can't humanly make it? If I leave Santa Barbara, I do not have proper clothes here for Washington, right now." I said, "I don't know what plane connections there are out of here, and we drove up here I wanted to see the country, and Floyd wanted to see it. My plane is in Indio. And"--I said, "I couldn't get there before way in the night, tomorrow night. None of those are connections I could get. It's just not possible to do it!" "Well," he said, "he told me to have you here at eight o'clock in the morning." I said, "You go back and tell him it's not possible." And I said, "Give this message very carefully. Tell

the President that I'm in Santa Barbara, California--I think he knows where it is. Tell him that I will--if he really wants me to come back, I'll do it as quickly as I can. But it'll be pretty rough to get back there before sometime tomorrow night, if I leave here right now and go home. And--probably late at night, at that."

F: Yes. Well, you start out three hours behind, to start with.

C: Yes. You've already lost three hours. I pointed that out to the young man. Sometimes they were pretty dense, working around the President.

And I said, "I'll call you back in half an hour." "Oh," he said, "I may not be able to get in to him in half an hour."

F: (Laughter)

C: "Well," I said, "send him a note, then." He said, "Oh, I'd better call you," and I said, "I don't *want* to be called at that hotel! You've already done that! I'm standing in a booth, sweating like a steer, because I was met at the door by the manager." He said, "Well, you sound like you're ashamed to come to the White House!" I said, "I'm not! I think that's private business! I don't think it's--it's a thing that's *blabbered* all over the place, and the papers pick it up. And then somebody comes at you--'What did the President want to see you about?'" And I said, "Then you get in this rat race that all these people get into, going in and out of the White House." I'd even go in at different gates, because I had no desire to have publicity. Of course, I never have been a publicity seeker.

And I said, "Now, you fellows get this straight! You'd better have a meeting among yourselves, or I'm going to call you all together and have one. I don't want this thing blabbered around, that I'm coming in and out of the White House! For God's sakes, let the President have one friend that he can talk to, that won't go get their name in the

paper and say, 'I saw the President yesterday, and the President unofficially said so-and-so. And I can say so-and-so off the record.' Now, get this straight!" I was hot, I was angry, standing in the sun, and these people acted--some of them just acted so damn silly. This fellow Watson never did. Jones was awfully silly. Oh, God, don't let him hear--this won't ever be out in the public. But he was--do you know him?

F: Yes.

C: Don't you agree he's a little stupid?

F: He's a congressman now, you know.

C: Oh, no!

F: From Tulsa.

C: Oh, my God. That's right, I gave him a donation! I didn't know he got elected.

F: (Laughter) Yes, he got elected.

C: Well, that doesn't make him smarter! You didn't have to answer my question--and I'm aware you didn't answer it.

F: Well, he was pretty green.

C: Well, he was young, and he was so impressed with my going back and forth to this White House, no question about it. And he was the one who was talking to me that time, I remember it distinctly. And I said, "Now, this is very important. I don't want messages left around these hotels. Use one of *your* names. I'm not trying to be secretive about meetings that I have with the boss, but"--I said, "I'm proud"--

F: Well, any hotel manager, or telephone girl, or anybody else would be glad to tip off the Santa Barbara paper [and] say, "Jackie Cochran is getting calls"--

C: Calls from the White House! Yes.

F: . . . little favor somewhere.

C: That's right, and you never know when they'll listen in, if they get a chance, too. Many leaks have occurred that way. They have a terrible time controlling it, I'm told, in these switchboards, and so on. I know very well, our little switchboard here, with all the prominent people we've had out here, and Eisenhower living here for seven winters, and all kinds of people coming here, his former cabinet members--I'm sure a lot of them listened in. Too exciting not to.

F: Well, sure. "Guess who I heard today?"

C: Yes, that's right. Well, I laid it on the line, pretty well, and I said, "All right. I'll call you back in one hour." And I said, "You either fish or cut bait, now. You get a message in to him. I can't stand right here in this booth. And I'm not going to be called at that hotel! No way! Now don't call me back there. Or," I said, "you can call my secretary, if you haven't gotten a decision. And I'll check back with her, or have her call me and say that 'you're wanted home.' So, you just give her that message," I said. "I'm in this hot booth. And I'll get out of here, and I'll call you later and get times straightened out."

So, I just went on back to the hotel, and I said, "I might as well start packing." He said, "Oh, not again! You're going to have to cancel that dinner tonight." I said, "Would you like to stay up? I'll arrange for you to be driven home, and I'll go and get some clothes." He said, "No, not at all." So, we had this dinner that evening, and we had to cancel it. I said, "I've been called back on an important mission to Washington." I never even inferred it was the White House. Curt didn't even know it--and they were really close friends. And he said, "Who wants you back there?" I said, "Oh, one of these

jokers." (Laughter) I didn't mean to call the President a joker, but I just said, "Oh, one of these jokers. I think I'd better go," just passed it off.

My secretary called [and] said, "You're wanted home." I said, "Well"--

F: (Laughter) You expected it.

C: "I'm packing! I'll be home later this evening." I said, "Set up some reservations for me." "Home" didn't mean a thing to anybody who was listening in, you know. It didn't mean a darned thing. So I said, "I'll phone you at twelve. Don't leave the office until I get back to you." I had a maid with me, and--so we hurried up and packed up the car, and started on out, and I stopped at a filling station and went in and phoned the office, and I said, "Now, what's it all about?" She said, "Well, they want you to get back as fast as you can. You've got an appointment the day after tomorrow morning at eight o'clock." I said, "Well, okay."

Well, I got out of there the next morning at daylight, and got this flight out--one o'clock flight, which gets you into Washington late in the evening. The plane was late, I was exhausted, and I'd kind of had enough of it. And I got to the hotel, and said, "Call Jim Jones." They had started to learn. So, I telephoned Jim Jones. And he said, "Your appointment has been changed to eleven o'clock." I said, "Thank God! I'm exhausted." I almost cancelled altogether.

F: (Laughter) Yes.

C: So, at eleven o'clock, I was in there, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. I sat down. And that's when I read the whole detail of the Haiphong plan. Can you imagine being trusted with a thing like that? It's just almost incredible.

F: Yes. It showed a lot of faith in you.

C: Well, wait till you hear this one.

He came in, and he was exhausted. He had some food brought to both of us. I said--I got to where I never called him anything. I didn't call him Mr. President; I didn't call him Lyndon. He objected to being called Mr. President. And I said, "You're not looking very well. You really just look terrible. Haven't you had any sleep?" He said, "Did I show you this terrible hernia I have?" I said, "No." So he pulled his shirt up, and here was this huge hernia. He said, "That's been hurting." I looked at it. Well, after all, you know I had given him an injection, and pulled his clothes off, and kept him from getting pneumonia on the way to--and I just felt like--

F: Was it right below the rib cage?

C: Yes, right in through there. Oh, God, it was awful. I said, "Listen. It even feels hot! This is not good." I said, "Why don't you stretch out there, if you want to talk?" There was a couch in the room. He said, "I'm going to do it." And I put a pillow under his head--I'll never forget. I took it--and I said, "You don't look well. I'll be taking you up to Rochester [the Mayo Clinic] if you're not careful! I'll be ordering you around." Just lightly, and jokingly. And he said, "Well, maybe I need somebody to order around, but I think I'm getting some orders."

And here was this long thing from McNamara, the plans that he had helped to--had approved, and he didn't expect any resistance to them whatsoever! It had to be approved by the President--to bomb Haiphong. There was always danger of hitting foreign vessels, and also it would destroy a lot of civilian homes if they blew up the gas that was stored there, fuels. And he said, "We would like to have an *immediate* reply." And the President lay on this couch, and just closed his eyes, and didn't say a word, and I

went on reading it, and I became very angry, when I was reading this. I guess he was watching with his eyes half closed--he said, "You don't like it, do you?" I said, "I've been in here so many times. And you've paid me the honor of using me as a sounding board. I'm an intelligent woman, or I wouldn't be here in the first place. I have to be intelligent. And you have to trust me, or you wouldn't have me sitting here as a sounding board. You've never asked me, and I've never given you an opinion. But, right now, I'm going to give you one. I don't care if you throw me out of the office. If you don't fire that son of a so-and-so"--and I called a name--"within a week," I said, "I just--you don't deserve to be president." And he was astonished! I had gotten all of this man I could take! And there was no question in my mind that he had a kind of fear of the man. I think what the fear was--the man was so--he had all of his commanders buffaloed. There's no question about it--in the military. Do you agree with that?

F: Yes. Well, he could spout statistics like a computer, you know.

C: I know it.

F: And I think a lot of people just took that for all-around brilliance.

C: I would have given anything in the world to have heard one session between them. I didn't. And I guess they didn't make tapes of conversations in those days. I'm serious! Are there any tapes available of meetings between him and McNamara?

F: I don't know that there are any of private meetings, only in larger groups. They taped some National Security Council, and some cabinet [meetings], and so forth.

C: Are they available to the public?

F: Not available to the public.

C: Well, I'd sure like to get cleared, just to hear one of them [that] McNamara was holding forth on. Do you think that's possible?

F: You'd just have to ask--they've got access under the rules now. Any time anyone wants to see anything, they have to consider the request. They can't do as they once did, and just automatically say no. You can actually [inaudible].

C: Well, I have no justification for asking. You realize that? It would only have to be done because of these many meetings I had with him.

F: Yes. Well--

C: And just out of my own--because he fired him within two weeks. I am not inferring--I don't want to infer to you or to anyone else that I had--had any part in decision-making by a president of the United States.

F: You didn't really oppose, yourself, the bombing of Haiphong, so much as you did McNamara's approach to it?

C: That is correct. And--in fact, I was in favor of dropping the A-bomb if necessary, and getting the thing over with, and cleaning it up, or--

F: That's something I wanted to ask you. Now, then--

C: Yes. Well, now, anyway--

F: Go ahead. I don't want to interrupt you.

C: Excuse me.

I finished reading this, and, in the middle of it, I got up and had my little tirade, and had my say. I said, "It makes me sick"--

F: How did he take it?

C: --"Mr. President"--and I just really called him Mr. President. And, five minutes before--no, not that, but twenty-five or thirty minutes before, I had been feeling his hernia. I had been feeling his deep sense of hurt. I don't know any other way to say it. And I felt this man was at the bottom of the hurt. I didn't think he deserved that.

So I went on reading it. I did not give the President my opinion on whether Haiphong should or should not be bombed. He wasn't asking me to do that. He was looking for sympathy.

And he said, "You know Luci?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I didn't sleep all night, thinking about this, the people that would be"--see, it was all spelled out. I could have read the whole thing--I did stay three hours that day, over three hours. And I read most of it. I tried to skip around, tried to get the heart of it. And the whole plan was there. What would happen, and what could happen, and the possibilities of escalating the war, if they did it. And the possibility of hitting a foreign ship, and the possibility of killing an awful lot of [the] civilian population, in the process. You know how people live around docks. Just like a rabbit warren, in these countries, particularly. Because they get bits of food, and they get fish, and they--they love to live down around these docks. Well, you know that from your own travels.

F: Yes.

C: And he said all this, and he said, "I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't sleep, and I was sitting in the--downstairs, I walked downstairs, and I sat down, and I rang for this Negro and told him to bring me something to eat, about midnight." I said, "That's the trouble. You always eat when you get nervous. You shouldn't do that!" Now, I would tell him that sort of thing!

F: Yes.

C: Isn't this weird? I don't know why, but--not about any state affair, but [a] personal thing. I felt I was sort of privileged to do it, maybe. Maybe I had assumed that, from the--

F: Well, you had a stake in it.

C: --in the background, yes. And I said, "You shouldn't do that! You shouldn't eat that late at night. It's not good for you." And the whole thing was so upsetting to me, I felt almost weepy. And I'm not a weepy woman.

He said, "Well, Luci--little Luci came downstairs, and she said--it was about midnight, and she said, 'Daddy'--you know she's turned Catholic?" He said, "You're a Catholic too, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, I'm Catholic. I believe in prayer; I believe in the faith of prayer." And he said, "You believe in the faith of prayer?" I said, "Oh, yes, of course I do." Well, he said, "Luci talked me into going down here to this little church, at midnight, with her last night, and she got these brothers"--they must have been ordained brothers. "And they came down, and we all prayed together." Now, have you ever heard this?

F: In the church?

C: Oh, yes. He said, "We stayed there for about an hour."

F: Do you know what church?

C: No. You can ask Luci.

F: Yes, I will.

C: Because her father told me, the day after it happened. Ask her where it was she took him. And he referred to them as brothers.

F: I will.

- C: I don't want these tapes listened to by the family. You know that, don't you?
- F: Yes.
- C: I don't know, I just--for some reason, I don't think it's--I think these should be closed for a while.
- F: Right.
- C: Or maybe never be used, I don't know. People with evil minds can put wrong interpretations on things, you know. So, I don't want that to ever happen where I'm concerned, because I don't deserve it. And he doesn't deserve it, either.
- F: Right.
- C: And I'm not--I hope I'm not saying the wrong thing, to change your opinion about me in any way.
- F: No!
- C: I don't like these women who think, "All the men are interested in, well, it's kind of"--because I'm not that kind of a woman. Never have been. I think you realize that.
- F: Right.
- C: And I also think you realize that if anybody ever saw this, isolated from the other material, I'm done. I'm sure that, from the flight, and his illness, and my great part in his--almost survival, certainly survival politically, had a lot to do with this feeling of wanting to use me as a sounding board, and to think out loud.
- F: Well, it's a little like--you were talking to me about that woman who you spent nine weeks in a tent with. You never can quite get separated from her again. You've got a special relationship to someone [with whom] you go through something like that.
- C: Yes, we even went through some danger together.

F: And you and the President had had one--I mean, a long association, but one period that was intense, and--

C: And his wife was involved, and his employee was involved, and--

F: Yes, right.

C: It was a--you know, I don't think he'd have had many friends who would have risked taking him on that long flight, as sick as he was. I didn't think he'd ever live until we got to Rochester.

So, anyway, he told me about how he'd gone down with Luci and these little brothers--they must have been little men. And when he got through, I almost couldn't keep the tears back. I had a feeling that this was just something--

(Interruption)

I had a feeling that here was a president--now, he never gave me any indication that he didn't believe in prayer, or that he was not--I don't know whether he was a deeply religious man or not. Do you know?

F: In some ways, I think he was very deeply religious.

C: Well, see, I never--as much as I knew about him, I didn't really, basically know that!

And I said, "Well, did you find comfort?" He said, "Yes. I think I made my decision." I said, "I pray to God the decision will be a wise one." He said, "I'm going to let them bomb." And the operation was either going to start that night or--and you could even tie the date down with Luci, on the night that he went to the church. And that--when he gave the decision, and when the bombing took place. They had procrastinated so long that later I found out most of the important things they wanted to hit had been moved out--which I think is just ironic.

And--that was another thing that I got an indication, too, of--with McNamara. He would make the decision, but then he'd procrastinate himself for a while. There may have been a lapse in there; I don't remember the detail.

So we talked on. I didn't talk; he did. And he had sat and read these papers until he had memorized the whole operation. You know, he had a very good mind. Don't you agree that Lyndon had a retentive, marvelous mind?

F: Well, he could just glance over something, and give you--most of it back to you.

C: Yes. Well, it's just what he did. And although I can read something I'm familiar with reading, like take orders in an airplane, I don't have to look at the words. They're there before me. Or read a book--a biography, or something. But when you start reading things that, in military--oh, what do you call it?--style, or--

F: Yes, parlance.

C: Or parlance--the way it's couched, how you want to put it together.

F: A lot of things.

C: And always in their third--

F: --in different directions, and--

C: And three--it's in the third person. It's a little different--difficult to digest, if you're trying to really--so I couldn't do that.

And I said, "You've got to get rid of this man, now!" I said, "Get your operation"--it's the only time I ever--I said, "He's going to--he'll destroy you! He's a horrible creature." And he said, "Do you know him?" I said, "No, sir, I don't know him. I've met him, but I don't know him. But," I said, "I know him so well now that I feel that I know his whole thinking process. He's overbearing. There's only one opinion, and

that's his." I said, "It's perfectly obvious that he's taken several fine opinions of other people here, that apparently he had to submit to you, but he hasn't followed them. And they're military men, and he's not." See, they had some different ideas. They had ideas of little annoyance raids on it [North Vietnam], very carefully pinpointed, but not a big massive raid on Haiphong. Because that's what it was. It was the worst raid of the--the Bay of Tonkin and this were the two big things in the war, as I recall.

So, I went on and on and on! He said, "Well, I've got to get up and work." And I got up to leave, and he said, "Oh, no, you're not leaving! Go on reading this stuff. Just sit here." He said, "I like to have you around." Now, this is a funny thing to say! And, do you know, he kissed me always in public. He would walk out of the office with me, with his arms around me, or his arm around me. But he never put his finger on me when I was in that room, at any time. Isn't that an odd one? All of his familiarity, or his--

F: Well, it was a different relationship.

C: --his sweetness, was always very public. For example, before hundreds of people, like in Seattle, Washington, at the World's Fair, in public rooms. Well, just like the night that he came to make the speech for Floyd. When he left, he said, "I don't want you to go down the stairs, now. You just stay right where you are." Then he puts--he puts his arms around Floyd, and he kisses Floyd! Then he came over and he kissed me very tenderly, and Lady Bird kissed me, and they left. If he told me not to go to the door; I didn't go to the door! Because I believe that when people tell you things, they mean it, or they wouldn't be telling you. And they don't want a protest from you.

I think that was something that the President liked about me, because I'm a very decisive person, too. And I make up my mind, and I go and stick with it. I mean, it can be changed by people who--if they've got a proper argument.

But that was by far the most meaningful and historical meeting that we had, at any time. And then--I don't know whether I told you this or not, but when I spent the night there, when [Austrian Chancellor Josef] Klaus was entertained, I got back into my room after the ceremonies were over, and there was a note saying for me to order my lunch, and where to call, and what to do. I was told all these things; I was in the Queen's Suite. There was a note that said, "The President would like to see you a little later. Somebody will come and get you." I went down and I sat in his office for an hour and a half that afternoon. And he came in, and he talked, and he talked--about what was happening in Washington, and not only the problem in--you know, Washington was burning that night, and that day. The next day, they took Klaus out on the yacht so he wouldn't see it. They were ashamed of it.

And this was extremely harmful to him as a man. He was just absolutely distressed and heartsick over this thing that was going on in Washington. And I know he--one remark he made--he said, "Is the whole world going absolutely crazy?" And I remember saying, "Yes, sir, it is!" (Laughter) Because I really had very little to say.

And that was the tough side of it, and I went on and on and on, until he was out of office, and he called me, two or three times--"Why don't you drive down to the Ranch and see Lady Bird and me?" Well--and then I got sick. And Lady Bird called me, in my hospital room, and said, "Maybe we'll send a plane for you, and you can come down here and play cards with Lyndon, or something, and come in the hospital." Now, this is true!

So, always he was kind of thinking about me, for some unknown reason. Was it because every time he was sick--see, he was in the hospital--every time he was in trouble, did he revert back to the--the great trouble?

F: He knew somebody who came to him once, when he was in trouble.

C: And made a decision for him. Because I made that decision. Nobody else made it. And, naturally, Lady Bird consented, with great--obvious relief, when I took him to Rochester.

(Interruption)

C: --to say about it, really.

F: Did he ever express himself about McNamara to you? Or did he mainly ask you what you thought?

C: He didn't ask me what I thought! I told him what I thought. I don't remember if he ever said, "What do you think?" My answer would probably--"You don't really want my opinion. You've got the greatest strategists that we have in the country to give you these opinions. I'm grateful to listen to you, and I'm"--

F: Did he talk to you after Haiphong, as to whether he thought he had done the right thing?

C: Yes, and he didn't think he had. He also said that--"It must have leaked." He thinks the intelligence was bad on it, or that the time--because he said, "I wasn't that long making a decision." But he never told me how long. And I did not see the papers--I mean, I do not remember the dates on the papers, in relation to the raid. And--no, I think he thinks it shouldn't have been done, afterward.

What I'd like to convey here is the many, many times that I saw him, the many times that he held forth, talking about--like talking about Washington! He must have talked forty-five minutes about the problems in Washington, and the Negroes down in the

South, the Negroes he had grown up with, and the fine people--and [he] talked about the little school he had, down at the Ranch, and about the people that worked for him. He just talked about everything under the sun!

And he never discussed his children, but this one time [when] he discussed Luci and her religion, and going down there and wallowing around on the floor--the way he put it--

(Interruption)

F: Did Johnson ever talk to you about the black leaders, the troubles he had with them?

C: Not too much. We discussed it, I think--or he discussed his feelings about it once. And--

F: He was pretty high on most of them, wasn't he?

C: Well, he thought that they were entitled to a fair place in life. And I do, too. Don't you?

F: Yes.

C: I think people should be accepted on their abilities, their proven abilities. I think to hire a man or a woman because of racial background, or promote somebody in the military because of racial background--you know this fellow Davis, who was the first black general?

F: Yes, Benjamin Davis.

C: I knew him slightly, but I got to know his son extremely well. And he was a very competent pilot, and a very good leader. Did you know that?

F: No.

C: A fine person, yes. Really a fine person.

I guess minorities have always had problems, even in communities. I think that's why you will find the Swedes stayed in Minnesota, and the Italians stay right around New York and herd together. You don't find too many Italians out other places.

F: And Germans all went to Milwaukee.

C: To Milwaukee, and Philadelphia.

F: And Cincinnati.

C: And Cincinnati. And I think that they feel--and, of course, I think the people that are so-called ethnic people--now, the Negro didn't have this opportunity. Never tried to be absorbed into society. They had something on their side that--maybe they felt they were better than we were. I don't know. I don't think it was always that way. Now, I think the Jews have had a little trouble, you know, with clubs, and this kind of thing. But usually there is some basis for it, of offensiveness or takeover.

F: Yes.

C: And I think a lot of the Jewish problem is that people are afraid of Jews. They have to be a lot smarter, because they--they have been a little ostracized, you know. I lived in a building in New York where--owned an apartment where--I didn't know it when I moved there--you couldn't even have a live-in Negro servant. And you couldn't have a Negro or a dog in the front elevator! If you had a dog, you had to go down the back elevator. And you could only have one dog--or maybe two dogs to an apartment; these apartments were enormous. And you couldn't have a Negro chauffeur sitting in the yard; you had to have a white chauffeur. I knew none of these things until I moved there.

And, many times, President Johnson--I think he just wanted to chat with me to relax. We'd talk about--just like we're talking about this now, when I would go back

there. But always with these papers to read--that were just as disconnected with any facts of life--(Laughter)--and then he would hold forth. And--"I've got to come to this decision." I remember once, when he was--must have been feeling very badly, he looked so badly that day, he said, "Oh! I'm so sick of these decisions. The pressure that they want out of you." And it was always McNamara doing the pressing.

Do you remember how the war started to go better when McNamara was out of there?

F: Well, it's been my feeling that without--really, without saying anything pro or con about McNamara, that Johnson should have let him go a long time before, just simply because he was--he was attached to the past, and a man in that position has to keep justifying what he's done, and he might--you can make an argument, either pro or con, again, on Clark Clifford, [that Clifford] wasn't up to McNamara intellectually--I don't buy that, but you can make that, if you want to. But he was a--he brought a fresh look at it. He didn't have his hands tied when he came in.

C: Oh, I'm very fond of Clark Clifford. He's a fine man. They were very--he and Evie were very good friends of ours. [Note: Evie was Stuart Symington's wife's name. Clark Clifford's wife was Margery.] We used to see a lot of them, and he was a very solid citizen. Nothing wrong with it.

You see, to me, the position--

F: But the difference was that--

C: --of a secretary of defense--I know we must keep checks and balances, civilian versus military, so the military doesn't take over. But it seems to me that when all of the decisions are gotten from each source of our well-trained military community--certainly

the decision has to be taken by the president and the secretary of defense; it has to be sent up to him, it goes through many hands before it gets to the president. He may not know what's going on half the time; there's no way for him to know it. I think that the decision should be clearly based on a combination of the opinion--or, should I say, the consensus of all of these men put together, and drawn up and say that--"There are ten commanders. Eight of the commanders believe this. And they're in accord"--this is majority rule, which is what we have in our country. And I, as a civilian sitting here, and seeing all sides of it, believe that they might be a little strong on it, but where do they have any choice but to follow it? And I think that's why both the Korean War and the Vietnam War went so badly, because it was being run by everyone and run by no one.

Maybe that's a stupid statement to make, but they were all running--nobody making very hard-fact decisions and following through on them.

F: Did the President ever talk with you about Curtis LeMay running with George Wallace?

C: No.

F: Did he ever talk to you about what he was going to do about Bobby Kennedy?

C: No, but he made--one day he started talking, and he says, "You know, if we just didn't have to make our mistakes"--I'm so afraid I'll say something here that I'm inferring I was telling the President what to do. I wasn't.

F: No, no.

C: Well, I don't want to, and I'm not trying--

F: You're not on the record there.

C: I'm not trying to infer that.

And he said, "Maybe it was a mistake to keep all the Old Guard here." That was one of the few times I spoke up. I said, "If I had been you, the day after I was made president, I'd have fired them all, and gotten a whole new cabinet, and a whole new regime here, and told them all to go sit on a tack." Because I think he tried very hard, from the many conversations that he had with me, to carry on what Kennedy would like to have done. And I think he did this until he earned the presidency under his own steam. I really do. Do you agree with that statement?

And I think he saw the fallacy of what he had done, to his own detriment. And I don't think there were ever--I think he thought they looked down on him. It was the Harvard--the Ivy League type of person.

F: Yes. Which was a foolish position for him to have taken, but he did it.

C: Well, in lieu [view?] of his intelligence and his integrity--and it was integrity that did this, when people--if you look back on history.

F: Did you have any advance warning he was going to quit, wasn't going to run again?

C: When he came out here on the eighteenth of February, to the house, and stayed the--stayed three hours, he and I went out in the car alone--I told you this story. And he wasn't feeling well, and he was nervous that day. And he had great respect for Eisenhower. And if I haven't said it before, I don't care, we'll put it on record again: General Eisenhower told me, on more than one occasion, that without the great help of Lyndon Johnson, he could not have succeeded in the presidency, in putting his legislation through. Because he served his whole two terms with a strong Democratic Congress, as you know--or a Democrat Congress. And Eisenhower was quite fond of him.

And I know at the meeting that day, they were talking strictly foreign affairs, Vietnam again, and things that were going on with Russia, and this kind of thing. Incidentally, he talked Russia with me quite a bit. Now, again, it's so hard to relate these stories, because he might talk about four or five subjects, things that were pressing him. And he'd just go through them, and--as though he was sitting there making his decisions, because he had a human ear to listen to him. You know, we say in aviation, "There's nothing that will ever substitute [for] eyeballing a thing." Just like with this platform [Skylab] that we just flew. Without human beings, they would have never known--they couldn't have repaired it in space. It's just a phenomenal thing when one studies it.

And--I had a feeling that he was eyeballing his own mind, out loud, to see how it sounded to him. Or maybe trying to catch my--I know I tried very hard, when I would be sitting and listening intently--he'd hold forth for half an hour. And he was a great talker!

F: Oh, yes.

C: Or maybe forty-five minutes on something. And particularly the Haiphong thing, and the Russian thing, because Russia was beginning to press us pretty hard, if you recall.

F: Did he seem to feel that he could work things out with the Russians?

C: Well, he made a remark. He said, "I shouldn't have had my nose to the grindstone on domestic affairs, as much as I did. I should have studied foreign affairs a little more." He made that remark to me one day. Again, I don't want to leave in a remark that the man didn't do his job. He did a great job. And I think I've conveyed my deep respect and affection for him. But--well, he just was so distraught. He said--you asked a question, and I'm trying to lead up to it. We went out in the car for about forty-five minutes, at least forty-five minutes, and I was a little nervous about leaving Floyd and General

Eisenhower together. I didn't have any servants on that day--nothing. And I--he wasn't in any hurry. He said, "Well, I'm not in any hurry! Drive me a little more." You know how you would do things like that?

F: Yes.

C: And he said, "Show me Eisenhower's office." And I said, "Well, unless his secretary is there, I couldn't do it," I said, "because I've never invaded his privacy." He said, "It's your house, isn't it?" I said, "Well, not that part of it! I've given it to him."

F: Yes.

C: So, the secretary was--she was a military girl. She was standing out, hoping to meet the President. And I introduced them. I can't remember her name. She was--not much, anyway, so it's not important. This wonderful gal, Rusty Brown, had had to go home and leave. And he said, "I'd like to see the President's office!" And so she invited him in. He said, "Are you going to do this well by me when I retire?" I said, "Well, it's a long time! I may not have any money to do it with by that time." "Oh," he said, "I don't think it's going to be very long." He just made a remark like that.

Well, I wrote him a letter. It was after he announced it. And I said, "I have dictated this letter *in re*--before you came to see us on the eighteenth of February." Because I wouldn't have to say, "My word of honor"; I just--"I have done this. And I was just awaiting the appropriate time to hand it to you or to mail it to you. And I want it to be as strong and as good as I knew how to prepare it. But if you had run again, whatever I could do"--because, after all, I ran in this district, and I got 55,000 votes. That's a lot of people. And I have campaigned this state, from one end to the other. And I've done a lot of campaigning in New York. I usually can--I don't mean this boastfully, but I can get an

audience when I want one. And I might get twice as many people if I go out, at the same meeting, [as] some person who [is] a little less known, you know, would receive under the same circumstances. They might even come to listen to me, or to meet me, or see me, because I get these kinds of letters. I can show them to you. They come every day. In this morning's mail I think there are eight or ten fan letters in there, because of this article that was in the paper, recently.

So, anyway, I said I would back him. Floyd and I both had talked this out, very carefully. We would both back him with everything that we had to back him with, either as Republicans for Johnson or as--or Democrats, or whatever. He was so touched over this letter, he practically had tears in his eyes when I saw him the next time. I said, "I wish you'd change your mind and run again. I think you'd beat their pants off." He said, "No, I've had it. I'm finished."

I think he based that on a deep, deep feeling of exhaustion and emotional fatigue. Imagine a man saying, "I sat up all night, and then I'll go down to the church with Luci, and pray for an answer." It's a very touching thing, you know. When you get this date from Luci, will you let me know?

F: Yes. Will do.

Did he ever talk with you about Vice President [Hubert H.] Humphrey?

C: No. Not that I can recall.

F: Or about his candidacy for the presidency?

C: No, I don't think we ever discussed it.

F: Did he talk to you about--I mean, could you see it forthcoming that he was going to stop the bombing, and start these really strong peace moves in the spring of 1968?

C: Oh, yes. He talked those constantly, and particularly after this Haiphong fiasco. Because it was that. A lot of civilian life lost. And I saw the papers--a lot of things that didn't even come out in the newspapers. And I wouldn't be saying that now if I thought these could ever get public, because everything is too fresh. People are too willing to grab every little thing they can and build it into a--a stupid mess, like they have with this [Patricia] Hearst girl now. Like they have with the Watergate thing, which has gone far too far. And--I think that we should be good enough citizens to--

F: Was he terribly upset by that Tet Offensive?

C: Oh, terribly. All of these things would come up. And, now that I look back on it, every time there would be a bad one, I would get a call to come to Washington. I hadn't thought of that.

F: So you could listen some more?

C: Yes. So he could think out loud.

I would never--I have no plans--I want you to know this, and I want to put it on record--of telling any part of this story. I haven't *told* much, but I've tried to convey a--something I saw that probably very few people were exposed to, with a president. I think maybe I want to even clear my own mind on it, because it was so remarkable and so unique and so unusual.

F: Oh, it--you know, it's a privilege to just--if you thought about it, decades ago, that you would just sit down and have some president talk to you about his pressing problems, over a period of time--yes, you'd think that would be the greatest thing in the world.

C: Well, it was--

F: I've often thought that about a lot of leaders, that I'd like to hear them talk, I'd like to get their feeling on it, you know, for a while.

C: I wanted to leave the thought--and I don't know if he did this with anyone else; I have no way of knowing. You may know. But he did give deep, prayerful thought--health-wrecking thoughts, and time. I'd go in there sometimes and see him and he'd look like he'd been dragged through a knothole, he looked so tired and so exhausted. And I don't think it would help--the frustration, and the people around him, and people coming at forty different ways. And then another thing he would say: "Well, I called in this commander, and I called in this chief of staff, and I called in this person. And they said--you know, Jackie, it's pretty hard to put these things together, and to really come up with a hard-clad decision, because there's such diversity in the thinking of these people, if they get a chance to express themselves." And again it would come back to this--McNamara.

F: Now, he played, throughout the war--of course, he got pictured as a--practically a mad dog up there, by a lot of people, but there were--somewhere between the extremely dovish group who said we just ought to lay it all down and come home, and those who said that--"Look, we're in it, let's finish it now, we've got the weapons"--and he always played the middle. And I wondered, did he talk much about being caught in the crossfire?

C: That's what I was just trying to express. He'd say, "I talked to this group"--he said, "I'll talk to my old colleagues. One group of 'em think this, and they get you all worked up." He said, "Another one thinks this. And then you get the military leaders in." And he

said, "Then a paper like this will come through that contradicts everything everybody has said."

I think it would be like a small child, who's quite intelligent, and there are five people trying to tell the youngster what to do at once. Honestly, I don't know any other way to--but to give a parallel. Does that make any sense to you? And, therefore, you get the child so confused he doesn't obey anyone. And I think some of these things might have happened--I don't know this to be true--when he hadn't given a clear-cut decision on them, entirely. I don't know this, now. Nothing was said. It was by an inference more than by a direct statement.

F: Did you think he had a grasp of the military strategy?

C: He certainly understood what they told him. If you practically know what was in a paper, or a plan of a--attack--

F: He wasn't, in other words, subject to being led around by the nose by so-called experts. Or by real experts, for that matter.

C: Well, I think McNamara led him into some decisions that were against his better judgment. And when I've looked at them, I think the President was right. But I think that he was the kind of a man--he must have been; any president would have to be, to be effective--you've got to have people you trust, in leaders, [and] if not, get rid of [them] and get some more! He can't make the decision all by himself.

But I think history is going to prove that most of these decisions were made against the judgment of many of our military leaders, and shoved through with the President. I think so.

F: Did he seem somewhat more relaxed after that renunciation of further plans to run? Or did you notice any difference?

C: Yes, I noticed the difference. One, I didn't see him as much after that. This was very funny. I didn't get as many calls to come to the White House--yesterday morning. Another thing--he looked like he was just sort of whupped. Very distressed about the whole thing. And that somewhere he had failed to do the right--make the right decisions. I think that was a great worry to him. Do you agree with that or not?

F: Yes. Well, I don't think he ever felt--

C: Well, you've interviewed so many people, and I've never asked you who they are or what they have said to you. But through all the people whom you have interviewed, have you gotten, now, a feeling running through it that he thinks he might have made better decisions?

F: I don't think he ever felt complete confidence in anything he had done. [He felt] that there must have been a better way, or things would be working better.

C: That's right. I think that that was just true. And, you see, he had--what, less than a year to go, when he made the decision not to run again. But the thing that you just triggered in my mind: when there would be a particularly bad goal, or a particularly hazardous plan being cooked up, I'd get these calls. But I had never thought about associating them--

F: Well, I was thinking about that, in relation to your being up there when Washington was burning.

C: That's true. And, do you know--this is very interesting. I was invited to that dinner about--oh, ten days before. Which was kind of late, for a White House invitation. And--he wanted to see me, that afternoon. And I went out of the White House and over

to his office, and sat for about an hour and a half and did nothing but talk about Washington. He said, "Isn't this terrible, to have a leader of another country see a thing like this in our country!" It was very distressing to him. And I think he was inclined to take almost the responsibility for that on his own shoulders. All of a sudden, he felt that he had really taken the whole burden of America on his own shoulders. And they were pretty big shoulders, but maybe not quite broad enough to carry it.

I know how defeated he looked that day, on that night, at dinner. And I hate the way that they started giving these dinners, where they have a hundred and forty people or something for dinner. It's not a state dinner any more. [You would] think you're in a public restaurant. And I know Mrs. Gronella [Ashton Gonella] called me, and said, "Mrs. Johnson would like to know with whom you would like to sit. And the guest list is on the way up, and there will be this many at each table." And I said, "Well, I would be very interested in having and looking at the guest list. But you can tell Mrs. Johnson that I have no intentions of making a decision. And wherever she wants to sit me, if it's the last table in the room, and with the least attractive people, it makes no difference to me whatsoever." She said, "Oh! I wish other people were that easy to please!" I said, "You mean people fuss about where they're seated in the White House?" She said, "Oh, yes!"

F: I saw her about two weeks ago.

C: She is a nice woman.

And I said, "I have no intentions of doing it." So she seated me with Lynda Bird, and--I think it was General [Earle] Wheeler. Which one of these generals that was later the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, I think--who married a young wife? I mean, a lot younger than he was.

F: [Inaudible]

C: Yes, well, whether it was Wheeler or some other person--I've got the list, who was seated with whom. He said, "You know, you remind me of--you look a little like my wife!" I said, "Well, she's probably younger than I am. She looks like me!" (Laughter) And I looked at her and I thought, "Gee, I hope I'm not that homely!" She wasn't that attractive! (Laughter)

But, anyway--

F: You went to dinner at the White House the last month he was there.

C: I know that.

F: What was the occasion?

C: I think it was one of the astronaut things. Because I was cross with him. I said, "Where's [John] Glenn?" And he looked a little startled. He hadn't been included. And every astronaut flown, not flown, the ones to fly--I think that was the occasion.

F: It was just a mistake?

C: I don't know. Because he--Glenn's a Democrat, you know. And Glenn's been, I think, kind of badly treated. He was our first man to orbit. I never forget people when they've done things.

So, anyway, as I recall, that's what it was.

F: Do you remember who you sat with?

C: That night it was really a state dinner. It wasn't one of these mob scenes. No, I don't remember.

F: [Inaudible]?

C: Not necessarily, that I recall. I remember getting a write-up that I had the most beautiful gown at the dinner that night. So a friend of mine told me, but I didn't read it--one of these gossip columns. You know, the women write about what women have doing.

F: Yes, Maxine Cheshire, and--

C: I don't read articles about myself, but somebody told me that, or somebody sent it and marked it as a little squib.

F: Did he ever remark to you on the fact that here he had been the chairman of the space committee as vice president, and, of course, he had been active in the [space campaign] as majority leader--and when we were going to finally put a man on the moon, it would be just after he had gone out of office?

C: No, he never--that's true. Well, I think he was very, very pro-space exploration. I think he was very pro.

I'll tell you an experience I had with him once. Now, this is a kind of a cute one when he was vice president. When I remember the many things that--they just sort of missed my mind.

F: Yes.

C: I had been invited by either General LeMay--because he was in office--to go down to Florida for a firepower demonstration. Have you ever seen one?

F: No.

C: Well, they have them about once a year, or twice a year. And if you ever have an opportunity to do it, don't turn it down.

F: I'd love to.

C: It's at Eglin [Air Force Base], Florida. It is unbelievable.

So, the Vice President was going down, and the President was going down. Now, they normally don't go to the same thing together, which always interested me. But for this one, they were both there. And word came through that I would go in the plane with the Vice President. And I just flat-out asked him--I said, "How do I deserve this?" He said, "Because I saw your name on the list, and I wanted you in the plane with me."

Simple.

He must have had a very deep sort of a warmth and trust and faith in me, over this one incident of the illness. I don't know what it was, but it was always--he said, "Wouldn't you like to ride with me?" I said, "Well, of course! I'm greatly honored. But I'm so surprised." I didn't even expect to be in the plane with the chief of staff of the air force. Or the secretary of the air force, or any of them. Boy, they were all there in full strength!

And there was a military man who was an aide in the White House, appointed to look after me. Of course, I didn't sit in the box with the Vice President and the President, or any of those people, but, boy, I was in the one right next to it. And this military man--he said, "You see that rocking chair?" They had put a rocking chair for the President, and the wind was blowing the chair, and it looked like a spirit was sitting there, rocking.

F: Rocking.

C: Gently. It was the weirdest thing I've ever looked at in my life, because the military aide said, "Now, he'll rock like that. And when he gets tired and irritated, he'll go faster and faster and faster. It will break it up."

And that's exactly what Kennedy did. And I'll never forget what dignity and what presence Johnson had. He looked so much more like a president than Kennedy did.

[Kennedy] looked like a young boy who was playing house, you know--playing president. Do you know what I mean? Johnson looked like a president.

F: Did Johnson ever talk to you about his relationship with Kennedy?

C: No. The nearest he ever came to it--he said, "I guess I shouldn't have kept the old gang around." He didn't refer to it as President Kennedy's staff and people.

No, I don't recall that he ever did. But I recall these many wonderful little things that he would--now, like riding down in the vice-presidential plane. My Lord! I was the only woman on the plane.

F: Did the military talk to you much about Johnson's policies?

C: No, I wouldn't say--well, yes. I had one or two of them discussing them. Because, in the first place, one or two of them knew that I had a warm friendship with him. That had to be known. It was known all over Washington. Because, for years, I had been seen with him, and at dinners, and my name appearing on White House lists continuously, and this kind of thing. People have to know that you're very close to a family. Now, the story about the illness--I never sat down and told it to a single person until I told it to you, and then the other day some of it appeared in this paper. It's open, public knowledge now, and there's no reason why it shouldn't.

F: Right.

C: But--I hope that you realize, I'm not a boastful person--

F: No.

C: --about my good fortune to be associated with people who've been in great jobs. And I don't mean I'm not impressed. I am very, greatly impressed and appreciative, and feel I've been one of the most fortunate women in America, to have been exposed to the great leaders in our country as I have been. It's just almost fantastic that I have been so exposed to them. Do you agree?

F: Right. Oh, yes.

C: With my background, particularly.

F: Lord, it's a--it's been a lifetime that--if they'd shown it to you, at almost any age, you wouldn't have believed it.

C: No. Well, it's--I tried to say a while ago, and don't think I finished--I think the phone rang. When you came here for the first sessions of interviews, I was very apprehensive, in the first place, and I developed--I have developed and do possess a feeling of great respect for you, and confidence, and hope that we'll all become friends.

F: Right.

C: Or I would never have told this session this afternoon. I would have just skipped it. Because I wasn't sure--I haven't told anything, except it's just so unusual to see a president like this.

Now, another thing that he did for me. I said, "I'm going out to the Far East, and I would like very much to go into some of the places"--he said, "That's a wonderful idea!" He set it up, as the President of the United States, that I was to be looked after. Can you imagine that? And I went into Danang, I went into Chu Lai, I went into one or two other places. I went on a supply mission in a helicopter, which is really a combat mission, any

way you cut it. I watched them calling in the planes, to do a little whupping of the other side. And it was just a fascinating experience.

I sat--you know, in Chu Lai, there's the most beautiful beach on earth. And it's just infested with sea snakes. Nobody can use it. And the men were not allowed to go into the town--this was a marine base that I was on. They flew me down there. And no less than a general came and got me, from Danang--which, after all, is very nice.

And the striking difference between that war and World War II--because I was in England during the Battle of Britain, the worst part of it--that was a dark war. This was a light war. Everything was lit up like a Christmas tree. Did you know that?

F: No, not really.

C: Yes. They had searchlights all over the fields. I never did get the sense of it. They said, "Well, if anybody flies over, here we'll get a crack at them." And they've got to fly in these lights to--to drop anything. We got a clear, lighted-up crack at them. That's why we haven't lost our bases. It was a whole new concept of warfare, and it was just fascinating.

And I sat and talked to these pilots all night long, until four o'clock in the morning, the ones who didn't have to fly the next day. We talked aviation, and there hadn't been a woman on that base in God knows when, because it was so far advanced and so--such a dangerous base that they had corpsmen; they didn't have nurses. And, boy, there weren't any women around! I was riding in the jeep the next day, with my back to the street side, and I was getting a few catcalls, and I said, "Well, they've just seen the legs; they haven't seen the face yet!" (Laughter)

Well, it was really very interesting, these trips that I had. I guess I had two trips.

F: Did you have--without getting into policy, but did you have an opinion that the war was run fairly well?

C: No, I don't think it was run well. I think we just sat there having attrition after attrition--day after day of attrition, is what I meant to say. And without going into the war to win it, I think it was just a terrible waste of human life and resources.

I'll never understand that war. I'll never understand the Korean War. Never! I don't know how anybody can understand it. Many times I wanted so badly to say to the President, "Well, why don't you either put up or shut up over there? Why don't we do it? You have the right." But he didn't ask me for my opinion. He was simply--

F: He just let you listen.

C: Yes, lamenting his own position in life. He didn't know what to do with it.

You see, no one, when you really analyze it--except the Congress and the president--had any control over that. When I was made president, if I'd have been the president, I'd have called for a joint session of Congress, I'd have called it behind closed doors--which certainly he has the right to do, doesn't he? Or does he?

F: I don't know, frankly, whether it's right or wrong.

C: And say, "Okay, boy, we're going to declare war, and we're going to go in there and clean this mess up. Or I'm going to shut it down and pull everybody out of there." Because he never had--there was never a war declared, you see.

F: Did he ever talk to you about his troubles with the press?

C: Not really. I don't think he had much trouble. Do you?

F: Well--

C: He talked about one or two pressmen that he liked, when we'd just have--you know. Many times I would go there and sit, and we'd just talk about very--almost trivial things. And I'd even get in the act of discussing somebody.

I remember I had just been to a White House dinner. And--oh, I saw him the day after the dinner, the Klaus dinner. I stopped in the office for about an hour. At his request, naturally. And he said, "How do you think my speech went last night?" I said, "I thought it was fine." And I said, "Thanks for the nice seating," you know, to be with the family. Again, here was a room full of military people, and I was seated with the daughter. So I had to have some special meaning for the family, or they wouldn't have put me there. Those things--it's just obvious, on the face of it. And it was in the newspaper, that I was a houseguest.

So all these people, the military people, must have known. I know I had one or two say, "You think you can get this message to the President?" And I said, "No, I wouldn't try." Never! I never took a message to the President. And I asked exactly two things of him. One, would he extend a certain man's time for six months so he gets his full retirement pay, which I thought was unfair--not to do it. And he hadn't heard of it, and he was glad I brought it to his attention. And--he was a leader. And secondly, to get the wings for the X-15 boys.

That's a pretty good record. You see, I never asked Eisenhower for two things, all of the years that I knew him. I have never asked anyone in any high position that I've been exposed to, or had access to, for anything that pertained to myself, or my home, or could better me, or my husband, or my family. Never!

F: Think we're about done?

C: I think we're finished.

End of Interview III