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HORACE BUSBY ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW VI

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HORACE W. BUSBY

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This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed by Horace W. Busby, Jr., on May 7, 1999.

Accepted by John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States, June 4, 1999.

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ACCESSION NUMBER 99-09

INTERVIEW VI

DATE: November 17, 1988

INTERVIEWEE: HORACE BUSBY

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Kozy Korner Restaurant, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Why is the Mineral Wells speech--?

B: Well, see, what was going on in this period in. . . .

G: This was October, 1949; Halloween, almost.

B: In October, November, maybe a little bit of December that year, he was back a year after having been elected senator. He, I think, had been accepted in the state entirely as the senator. Coke Stevenson was bitching around, I guess, about it, and some two or three of his people in Austin, but there wasn't any sense among the movers and doers that Johnson shouldn't be senator. Frankly, most of them, I think, were glad that he was. And so in a roundabout sort of way, there developed this effort. Effort is probably too strong a word, but there developed this thing of using this time to go around and meet people or meet with groups, present himself as a senator, because he didn't necessarily feel all that much like a senator. He had always held the office in such awe that I don't know exactly when he did begin to feel like a senator. So he had this thing in mind and various other people had it in mind, too. There wasn't somebody circulating it around; it was just people, you know, I [think] this is a wise thing to do for Lyndon or with Lyndon.

At this meeting, I don't know--the southern newspaper publishers group, obviously, didn't meet in Texas every year. Up until a moment ago I had been a little confused on my memory of it because I thought it was a Texas group, and yet I've always known, well, no, it--that wasn't quite right. Well, I see now what it was, some kind of multi-state group. So Oveta Culp Hobby, publisher of the *Houston Post*, intervened with the program committee and invited him out there to speak. It wasn't a dinner. He was speaking in a relatively small room. There's a speech somewhere that he delivered.

G: Was she supportive of him?

B: Oh, yes. She was trying to help him through this period. But because of the nature of the meeting, you had all the heavies among the Texas publishers there, which of itself was a little bit unique. No problem at all getting the small-city daily publishers together, but the big ones didn't come together that often or that easily. So Ted Dealey was there, and of course Ted Dealey congenitally disliked Lyndon Johnson, primarily because, among many other things, during the war when the *Dallas Times Herald* was about to run out of paper, couldn't publish, Johnson showed up with Tom Gooch at the Priority War Production Board and made a pitch for them being given some paper, and Ted Dealey said, "Curses. We were about to exterminate our opposing paper and this vile son of the Hill Country came in and spoiled it." Ted was a noisy, rough, friendly even--sometimes--type of guy, unlike nearly all the rest of the Dealeys and Deckers and all else.

So anyway, Oveta Hobby was really going to work this thing out, you know, make everybody happy. Not [make] everybody happy but bring [them] together and have an

atmosphere of respect for the junior Senator. She did know Washington, and she knew Lyndon, and all like this. So the situation is this: meeting in this wholly spartan room at, I guess, the Crazy Water Hotel--there were two hotels in Mineral Wells--I think this was the Crazy Water. And there were one or two--Mineral Wells used to be a political town, because they could have state conventions there and there were some political types in the hotel business, even. I can't remember the fellow's name but he was a member of the state Democratic committee, big politician, friend of mine, friend of Johnson's. He was in the room, people like this, and Dealey was there and he was sitting with Allen Duckworth, back in the crowd. You know about Duckworth.

G: Political writer for the [*Dallas*] *Morning News*.

B: Yes. Big, big influence for a period in Texas. It partly was just Duckworth's presence. He walked into a room, everybody else said, "Sir."

G: Why was this? Was he a commanding figure physically?

B: Big man, great big man. Very droll, very witty, most of the time. Sometimes it wasn't so funny. But he had the confidence of political men more than almost anybody else. He wasn't a challenger. And you know, the ten-ton gorilla sleeps where the ten-ton gorilla wants to sleep. That's the way it was with Duckworth. He was a friend of mine, and he was usually a friend of Johnson's, although sometimes he'd get ticked off at him on a conservative/liberal thing. Well, anyway, Duckworth either was in on or knew, or figured out what was going on in this situation out there, and so he's sitting next to Dealey. I don't know to what extent--this whole thing may have been aimed at Dealey, but I was

unaware of any other publisher who needed conversion at that point. So Mrs. Hobby gets up and she's got herself a written-out speech to introduce Johnson, and you know, it was not a you-know-who-I-mean, the junior-Senator-from-Texas-type speech, it was a thought-out, three- or four-page speech. She was going along through her speech, well spoken, well turned speech, and each paragraph or each page was more, more, more about the sterling qualities of the junior Senator, and she said, in one memorable line, "Furthermore, Lyndon Johnson is a man of his convictions," and Ted Dealey said, sotto voce, to Duckworth--and here's little Horace sitting on the row just in front of him; he was back over my right shoulder--"Well, convictions, hell. They haven't laid a glove on him yet like they ought to," something like that. Duckworth told me later, "As soon as he said it, I looked up and it registered that you were there, and I said, 'Oh, shit. Everything's gone down the tube.'" Well, of course I did tell Johnson what he had said and Johnson was mad and he was also hurt, and probably also scared. And so this whole big, elaborate effort to bring them together as brothers fell flat because I was sitting there and heard it. It was just a typical Ted Dealey smart-ass remark. Johnson, by God, he was never going to give down to Ted Dealey again. I don't know the rest of the history of it but it was funny.

G: Did he have a relationship with Dealey after that?

B: Well, no, but I don't know how relevant or how fair that is. He didn't have to have one. He did have one with the *Times Herald*. Tom Gooch, who was the guy who built it [was], and Jim Chambers later on was his friend. And there was an old fellow, Albert

Jackson, he just loved Johnson, or seemed to, and was always around. I don't know how valuable Albert was. I never knew that. He was a stooped guy with a hump on his back, I guess from arthritis. He died up here. He was up here to attend a dinner with Margaret and when he didn't come after a long time she got some male journalist and they went to his room and he was on the floor dead.

G: What about Duckworth? You said Duckworth liked him generally?

B: Yes. I don't remember how it trailed off. Back when we went to Hyannis Port after the convention, Duckworth did not like the Kennedys. I forget what period he was in at that time but he didn't like them. So we all went out to the compound on Saturday morning before leaving and we went to Otis Air Base, got on our Continental--I think it was a prop jet, maybe--to fly to Nashville. We flew to Nashville and he made a speech on behalf of Estes Kefauver. But all the press was brought out to the compound, and it was drizzly. Jackie was very pregnant; she made a sort of a distant appearance. Bobby was around. There wasn't any glamour to the compound at that point, but everybody got to see it. Johnson had picked the editors from Texas that he had taken up there. They were small-town people. I didn't recognize it until well after the fact that what he was really picking were little editors from Catholic counties. He was freshening them up or something. I mean, he's still fighting 1928. But we went out and then got back, came back to the bus; they all got aboard the bus, and Kennedy, I think on his own instinct, came back over to the bus. For some reason--I guess I was walking with him and came back over to the bus and motioned for the driver to open the door. This was the press

bus, and then he got aboard the bus and stood up at the front and made a speech about Lyndon and Texas and winning, and it was quite good. I was impressed; it was all ad-lib and he was quick, and it was good things to say. If I'd been writing it for him I wouldn't have thought of them, and that's my standard of whether it's a good speech or not. So he went away and said, "If we win, I want you all to come back," all that usual stuff.

So we went on out to Otis and got aboard this plane and I kind of floated around on the plane. I was sitting up at the front in a jump seat of some kind up by the galley and we took off and got up above--a hurricane was approaching. It was a little dicey both coming in and going out. And so we got out, got up in the sunshine and Duckworth was sitting on the front seat, one of the front seats in the cabin, with a typewriter on his knee. He always had a big cigar. In those days you didn't have smoking sections. He was sitting over there smoking cigars and typing on this little portable he carried. I guess it was an Olympia. And he said, "Busby." He just kind of gestured and I knew that he meant for me to read his lead. He said, "Senator John F. Kennedy, at his Hyannis Port home on Cape Cod, Saturday morning accepted the sword of Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and said, "The men may keep their horses." (Laughter) He worked all day trying to get me to take the bait and tell Johnson that's what he'd written. Of course, that wasn't his lead, but. . . .

G: It seems that one time you described an occasion when Duckworth was out at the LBJ Ranch.

B: He was out there once to celebrate an occasion which I had nothing to do with, and Price Daniel was out there and Johnson was there. Daniel and his wife and Duckworth, who intermittently had a wife, but I don't think she was there, they were down in the guest house, that first house west of the main house. So it came a flood, torrential overnight rain. I've been in the guest house when this happens and there's a draw coming out of the field behind the house, and it fills up with water like the river and it's quite broad and swift and deep. And Johnson got one of those big-wheeled four-wheel tractors--well, you know, big conventional kind of tractor you pull things around with, and went across the water. I think he rescued Daniel first, and then he went back and rescued Duckworth. Duckworth is so big and fat, weighed about 350 pounds, and they were uncertain about going out through the water with Duckworth hanging on, because they weren't sure he could hang on, in the first place, and they were afraid if he didn't hang on and fell down in the water that's the last they'd see of him. Johnson used to tell this story. He wasn't too sure--he thought about putting on the brakes real fast. It was some big event, the two funny things about it being that none of the parties, including Duckworth, wanted anybody to know they were there. And instead it turned into a big, front page story. I guess, as could happen, they got cut off from civilization or something, I don't know. The second thing that happened was that Duckworth had come out there--I don't know under whose sponsorship. It might have been Daniel's more than Johnson's. I'm not sure. But he came out and brought a camera and he took a picture of Johnson by the swimming pool and some other pictures, and they ran some months later in *Newsweek*. He sold them to

Newsweek. Forever after--until that point I used to be a cameraman and I had my little camera around with me and Johnson just stopped. He stopped once at NATO and [said], "Put that up." I said, "I won't have to take a picture of you." "That's what Duckworth said." He really screwed things up. But Johnson thought Duckworth's whole purpose was to take an unflattering picture. What was wrong with his premise there was that Duckworth was not a good enough photographer to take a good picture. Now, I could take a good picture of Johnson.

G: Was there a reflection on the Ranch, too, as far as LBJ was concerned, that Duckworth was making the Ranch seem more either precarious or--?

B: No. Duckworth was just publicizing. Johnson was funny about this. I know once I took my family down there, which was a perfectly nice thing to do and I did it several summers, three or four summers. The kids just loved it. There was nobody else there except the servants and maybe the foreman, I don't know. They could use the swimming pool and we could ride around. It was all interesting to them. They still like it. We went down there--well, I wouldn't know what time of the year; it was a fairly warm time of the year. But we were down there and so in the nighttime before, [there was] lots of flash lightning on the horizons back towards Fredericksburg and some rain, not a lot, I don't think there ever was much rain actually at the Ranch. But I know that country and all through the southwest part of Texas and I know what this is likely to mean. And sure enough I was waked up during the night by a low roar and I knew what it was immediately; it was the Pedernales. I didn't know this for sure but I was hoping--I'd never been down there

before--I was hoping that the cabin was built above the high-water mark, which it of course was. Since there hadn't been rain there, we didn't have this draw separating us from the main house in the first place. I got up early the next morning and there was the Pedernales. Instead of being way down there it was almost up to that service road. That's a lot of water. It was over the highway across from the Ranch, the old highway, which I don't know whether it's still there or not. We got a mess and a half of a flood, and it kept going up. See, this water was coming from miles away. There was no way to get out. There might have been some kind of a back-road way to get somewhere, but I didn't know the country that much and it wasn't a straight shot. You would have to have a real stroke of genius to get out. But it was fine; it was perfectly all right.

Sometime toward the end of the morning some question came up there. You had a black man [there] who wasn't worth a damn and a couple of black women or something, but something came up that I thought was significant with regard to the safekeeping of the Ranch. I don't have any idea what it was. So I called Mr. [Jesse] Kellam in Austin and I said, "We've got a real flood out here," and told him the dimensions of it and whatever the problem was, and asked, "What is your counsel? What should happen?" And the net of it was unless it got far more advanced than it was, "Nothing. Just forget about it." He could understand that I was being prudent but, oh, I guess--and so anyway I told him, "This is pretty exciting for my kids, and I'm really enjoying it. I'm glad I'm out here." About three hours later he called up. Jesse's one of these rote guys you wind up, you know, but he called up, "Just talked to our friend in Washington." He said, "He doesn't

mind you being at his place but he sure doesn't like for you to be a broadcaster spreading it all around about the flood." And I said, "What do you mean, broadcaster? I haven't told anybody but you. How did he know?" "Well, that's what he's talking about. You shouldn't have told me about it." Well, this is the kind of thing that made me really want to throw up sometimes. That was so goddamned dumb. First place, Jesse didn't need to call him, didn't need to tell him. He doubtless said, "Buzz says he's having a lot of fun out there," something like that, you know, and then Lyndon Johnson, of all the damned things that he could have on his mind, he didn't have to worry about that. But he was, see; he was worried that it would get out that his house--once upon a time he was away; this was soon after they bought the place. And it flooded like this and he couldn't get across to Lady Bird, and he came out in a little plane that landed on that highway. I don't know when that was.

G: 1952.

B: Was it? I had nothing to do with him at that time, but there were people around, as there always are with something like this, just like all these doctors second-guessing Mike Ditka's doctor. All these guys who've got private planes and all, saying the Senator's an idiot for landing on that two-lane highway and expecting to take off again, because--I'm not a flight guy but I thought, "Jesus Christ, sure he got in okay, but the odds were so large against doing it successfully," because at that stage in life all the telephone wires and everything else are above ground, utility wires, and from the air you can't always know that you're seeing those things. Well, that gave him some bad publicity--he thought bad

publicity, and it was. It was deservedly bad publicity because of his own behavior. So when he'd get bad publicity about something he could stretch it so thin.

(End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview VI)