

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 8: And so you get bodies lying there for three or four days.

May 2, 1965 | 3:55 AM | LBJ and William Tapley Bennett | WH6505.01–7518 | LBJ Library

[Footnotes added]

Signal Corps Operator: Mr. President?

LBJ: Yes?

Signal Corps Operator: All right, I have Ambassador Bennett. If you can't hear, flash me and I'll try to relay for you, sir. If you want to.

LBJ: All right.

Signal Corps Operator: Go ahead, please.

LBJ: Tap? Tap, what's going on down there?

William Tapley Bennett: *[Inaudible.]*

LBJ: I can't hear you—a little louder.

Bennett: This is the first night in four nights that we haven't had *[unintelligible]* fired. We've had a few shots tonight, but not many. Everybody's *[unintelligible]* and morale's good.

LBJ: Have we got things in the shape that we want them.

Bennett: Well, I think it's moving along, sir. Tomorrow *[unintelligible]* days, and I think it's moving along. *[unintelligible]* pick up this *[unintelligible]* travel tomorrow downtown *[unintelligible]*.

LBJ: Talk as loud as you can.

Bennett: Yes, sir. Sorry to hear you've got a bad cold.

LBJ: Yeah.

Bennett: But here ... and we've got a good team in here. The military has come in in very fine fashion, very quickly, and the *[unintelligible: police?]* are very pleased it happened, I must say.

LBJ: Where do these casualties come from, these last ones?

Bennett: Yes, sir. They came from, I guess you could call them snipers, as the troops were making their rounds, and this is pretty [unintelligible] in the streets here, really, really fanatical.

LBJ: Some pretty what?

Bennett: They are fanatical.

LBJ: Yeah [unintelligible].

Bennett: Just wild, [unintelligible] fever, but I think now has run out. Because you can only do that so long without falling over with exhaustion. And then I think the consensus of our people [unintelligible] reality [unintelligible] a good many of the rebels have been giving up, and the legitimate political folks [unintelligible] or into hiding to get away from their own [unintelligible] of the people opposing [unintelligible]. And all in all it's been a chaotic situation [unintelligible].

LBJ: What have you done to get information to the people themselves?

Bennett: We are doing the best that we can. All the radio stations are out except for one run by the local air force. Of course, there's no newspapers going. But we are using the Voice of America and also some of the stations in Puerto Rico that people here listen to.

And we've gotten across now food and medicine supplies. The Peace Corps [unintelligible] here with me, and the Peace Corps has been doing a wonderful job in the hospitals, and that's widely known. All their nurses are working around the clock, and they've just done their usual fine job.

LBJ: How many total casualties do we have as of now?

Bennett: It's very hard to estimate, Mr. President. I would think that it's probably up around a thousand-odd. There's just no way of counting, because downtown you can't even get—they even fire on the ambulances. And there are roadblocks everywhere. And so you get bodies lying there for three or four days. We've got to have—and I think we have now—troops to [unintelligible] pick up and avoid that danger of [unintelligible].

LBJ: Is [Juan] Bosch completely out of control of his people?

Bennett: Well, he's a man of [unintelligible] I think he is as appalled by the [unintelligible] as anybody else.

LBJ: Does he have any control of his colonels?

Bennett: They seem loyal to him, but I think [unintelligible] has developed [unintelligible]. One of the first colonels [unintelligible] went into the town today [unintelligible] and he's down there [unintelligible]. And so [unintelligible] figurehead, but [unintelligible] well know [unintelligible]. But he is [unintelligible] too much realism down here.

LBJ: I want you and [General Bruce] Palmer, separately, to get me reports during the day, every three or four hours.¹

Bennett: All right, now we'll try and do that. I had a long meeting with General Palmer this afternoon, and with [Vice] Admiral [Kleber] Masterson.² We've got a good relationship [*unintelligible*] and everybody ... the Marines landed, as I say, in fine style, and the [82nd] Airborne have been in, and we've got more coming tonight, so [*unintelligible*] all right.

LBJ: Have you closed this gap on the end of the bridges, and where—

Bennett: We have not. That may be done tomorrow. It worries me because the exit routes [*unintelligible*]. And I think the sooner we get that closed the better we'll be.

LBJ: What are we waiting on?

Bennett: Well, we've got this international problem, the OAS [*unintelligible*], and the OAS people arrive beginning today and [*unintelligible*].

LBJ: How many people do we have killed of our own?

Bennett: About three, I believe, and, oh, maybe about thirteen ... I'm sorry, three killed and thirteen wounded.

LBJ: Well, I got a report tonight that you had two extra killed and about twenty wounded.

Bennett: I'm sorry, I don't believe I have that.³

LBJ: Are you working closely with [John] Martin?⁴

Bennett: Yes, we do apparently have that report. They're just looking it up now. Sorry I don't have that [*unintelligible*].

They've met with considerable small arms fire and sniping as they go through the streets here, and these people just really opened up their arsenal and handed out everything to the rabble [*unintelligible*] first day of this [*unintelligible*] last week. And that [*unintelligible*]. We've got to get some way of recollecting those arms or we're going to have trouble here for *long* time.

¹ General Bruce Palmer Jr. of the U.S. Army was Commander of U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic and Commander of Task Force 120.

² Vice Admiral Kleber S. Masterson commanded U.S. Naval forces in the Dominican Republic and was Commander of Joint Task Force 122.

³ The Department of Defense's daily summary of the military situation for 1 May counted three U.S. personnel killed during the day and thirteen wounded during the day, bringing the totals to date as four killed and twenty-eight wounded. Another thirteen were wounded on 2 May. DOD Chronology [2 of 3], Dominican Crisis 1965, Box 6, NSF-NSC History, LBJ Library.

⁴ John Martin had been U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic from March 1962 to September 1963.

Yes, I have this military briefing that was prepared late this afternoon: Marine casualties thus far: twenty wounded and two dead. And the 82nd Airborne has sixteen wounded, one dead and one probably dead. So that would be four—three certain and four possible deaths and thirty-six wounded. They—some of these [unintelligible] as I say, are just [unintelligible].

LBJ: I sure think your [unintelligible]⁵ people ought to be operating in every station you have, the one there, in Puerto Rico, and every other where. Are you distributing any leaflets at all?

Bennett: We're getting that going. We've got a good man coming [unintelligible] arriving. He's already here [unintelligible] got in a little while ago at the airport. And we're going to try to get a radio station going in the next day or two [unintelligible]. He's meeting today with the local military junta [unintelligible] officials, because all these things have been knocked out. And communication has been one big problem around here. For our official purposes we've had to talk on open lines and that [unintelligible] these stories on the front page. You know that problem.

LBJ: I would spend a good deal of time with them. I would sure do what I could to see that they had the facts.

Bennett: We're doing our best, sir. [Unintelligible] buildup here now [unintelligible] every day around the clock [unintelligible].

LBJ: What do you need from here?

Bennett: Well, I just think we've had wonderful support. General Palmer and I asked for support [unintelligible] around 11:00 today, and by about 2:30 they were on the way. Can't ask for better than that. In fact some of them may have already arrived. [Unintelligible] said they would get here before 3 in the afternoon.

LBJ: Is your airport open tonight?

Bennett: Yes, they land tonight.

LBJ: Is it secure?

Bennett: Yes [unintelligible] there are no problems at all [unintelligible].

LBJ: What is [OAS Secretary General José Antonio] Mora[-Otero] doing?

Bennett: He arrived today and we're all meeting with him this afternoon. He's meeting with the junta officials [unintelligible] the other side [unintelligible].

LBJ: He get any feel of it?

⁵ It sounds as though he says "USA" or "USAID" people, but from the context he may be referring to Voice of America, or VOA.

Bennett: Sir?

LBJ: Does he get the feel of it?

Bennett: [*Unintelligible*] sure that he does. And we had some of the Latin American ambassadors [*unintelligible*], one of whom used to the serve at the OAS in Washington and [*unintelligible*] one of them said the other day, the only thing [*unintelligible*] here is U.S. Marines. They are [*unintelligible*].

LBJ: I would sure try to see that the proper kind of information from the ambassadors went to their respective capitals.

Bennett: I've been urging that. I've been in touch with people every day [*unintelligible*] same way.

LBJ: I would try to have Palmer give me fifteen, twenty minutes and have them all, every ambassador that's there, come to some kind of meeting in order to warn them on their own safety.

Bennett: [*Unintelligible*]. They know that. [*unintelligible*] with General Palmer [*unintelligible*] dangerous [*unintelligible*].

The recording ends abruptly.