

WH6403-17-2681_scroller

Date: 1964-03-28

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: George E. Reedy

Start Time: 03:06

Place: LBJ Ranch

SCROLLER TITLE: "It Is a Major Disaster"

SCENE SETTER: At approximately three o'clock a.m. on 28 March 1964, President Johnson spoke with White House press secretary George E. Reedy about an earthquake that had just struck Alaska. It was the largest earthquake recorded in U.S. history, measuring 9.2 on the Richter Scale and triggering a dangerous tsunami. Audibly groggy and sick with a cold, Johnson gave instructions to Reedy.

Signal Corps Operator: Go ahead, please.

President Johnson: George?

George E. Reedy: Yes, sir.

President Johnson: Anything more on the earthquake?

Reedy: Yes, sir. My reports between [Department of] Defense and the White House are slightly conflicting. We won't worry about that. The situation in Alaska is as follows. Anchorage: power and lights—

President Johnson: Anything we can do about it?

Reedy: No, not at the moment.

End of excerpt 1.

Reedy: Now, what it really amounts to—it is a major disaster. There doesn't seem to be any question about that. But the authentic information that we can get seems to indicate that it's not quite as catastrophic as the . . . some of these wild reports indicated at first. The major thing that we have to wait for now that might still put this in very bad shape is what happens when that tidal wave hits Hawaii, and it's probably hit by this time. [*Unclear*]—

President Johnson: Or San Francisco [California]. [*Snorts.*]

Reedy: Yes, San Francisco; however, they are not as concerned about San Francisco.

President Johnson: [*sleepily*] Now, the next thing I'd do is when I talk to whoever you talk to next, I'd see that they notify [McGeorge "Mac"] Bundy of everything and ask him to check, see if there's any instructions we should get to anyone that haven't been alerted, if the command in the Pacific or Alaska or any people that haven't been notified, 'cause that'd be the first thing we'd want to know—

Reedy: Right.

President Johnson: —so they could prepare or anticipate anyplace it might hit, like our people in Japan.

Reedy: Right. Incidentally, the commander in chief of the Pacific is also on the alert, which . . . He would be—have a major responsibility for Hawaii.

President Johnson: Let's just see whoever have—

Reedy: [*speaking under President Johnson*] That's Admiral [Harry D.] Felt.

President Johnson: Let's ask [Arthur "Art"] Sylvester when we talk to him—let's don't call him, but when he calls us—to see that the Pentagon top man talks to Bundy and see—any notification or alert [*unclear*] or authority that anybody needs to be given, that they be given it. Right away. So—

Reedy: Right.

President Johnson: —let's don't wait and [*Reedy acknowledges*] try to get a message to somebody that doesn't come . . . OK. Anything else?

Reedy: I don't think so, sir.

End of excerpt 2.

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