

LBJ, Baker Reunited Before Death

By Jack Anderson

Three months before Lyndon Johnson died, he invited Bobby Baker to the LBJ Ranch for a quiet, poignant reunion.

It was the first time the two men had seen or spoken to one another since Baker came under fire for wheeling and dealing in the early 1960s.

The former President had a foreboding that death was near. We reported on Sept. 26, 1972, that he was "calmly getting his affairs in order for an early demise." As part of his preparations, he wanted to make his peace with Baker.

In happier times, the bright-eyed, young Baker had been Johnson's lightning rod in the Senate. He had come to Capitol Hill as a 14-year-old page boy fresh from Pickens, S.C. He caught the fancy of the imperious Johnson, who had always wanted a son. "You're like a son to me," Johnson told him, "because I don't have a son of my own."

Johnson the patron and Baker the protege became inseparable, working together to master the Senate. Baker was as sharp as Johnson was shrewd. There were few whispers in the Senate cloak-rooms, for instance, that Baker didn't pick up and report at once to Johnson.

But then Baker began making business deals out of the backdoor of the Senate. These

eventually were spread on the front pages. In a political panic, Johnson hastily cut all ties with his protege. He complained privately that Baker had betrayed him by getting involved in shady business ventures.

Bobby Baker knew most of Johnson's personal and political secrets. It was whispered around Washington that he would use this information to keep out of prison. But he was convicted in 1967 of fraud, theft and tax evasion and was sentenced to three years in the federal pokey.

He began his sentence in 1971 and was paroled the following year. Throughout his ordeal, he remained silent.

Not until last October, however, did Johnson send for the young man he once thought of as a son. Baker confirmed that he and his wife, Dorothy, were invited to the LBJ Ranch for an overnight visit. "The President was warm and friendly and hospitable," said Baker. "We just talked over old times."

Political Payoff—A billion-dollar contract and a crucial government appointment have been won by the corporations which admitted giving illegal donations to President Nixon's re-election campaign.

Both American Airlines and Ashland Oil, the confessed secret contributors, have

benefited mightily from recent government decisions.

Ashland will reap billions from an agreement reached July 25 with the oil-rich kingdom of Iran. The landmark agreement needed U.S. government sanction. Ashland will share 50-50 with Iran in producing, refining, and marketing oil that will move from the wells of Iran to the gas stations of America.

The administration wanted the contract now to insure a stable Middle East supply of oil. Iran benefits by being able to buy more U.S. weaponry, principally the new Navy F-14 fighter.

On July 20, Ashland's chairman, Orin E. Atkins, acknowledged that his firm poured \$100,000 in corporate cash into the Nixon coffers.

On July 6, American Airlines made the first corporate disclosure. Chairman George Spater told of raising \$75,000 for the President's campaign. Of this, \$55,000 was in corporate funds, which under law cannot be given to political campaigns.

The illegal donation, which was "laundered" through a Lebanese broker, came at a time when the Civil Aeronautics Board was considering an American merger proposal. The proposed merger with Western Airlines was even-

tually turned down, with CAB member Bob Timm the lone American supporter.

Yet astonishingly, Timm was subsequently appointed chairman of the CAB. It turns out he is an old locker mate and golfing partner of Charlie Strickler, American Airlines' Washington-based vice president.

Earlier this year, the White House tried to pull strings to get another pro-American Airlines man on the CAB. Judge Lee West of Oklahoma, the state where American has its maintenance base, was selected to replace Robert Murphy. West, however, was blocked by the crusty Sen. Norris Cotton (R-N.H.) who rebuffed the pleas of White House fixer Peter Flanagan.

Both Timm and Strickler were out of town and unable to be reached for comment. An American Airlines spokesman said it would be "inappropriate" to comment in light of an investigation by special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Ashland Oil told us there was "no truth" to any allegation of a connection between its illegal contribution and its agreement with the Iran government. "We've been talking to Iran for a number of years," a spokesman said.