The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM C. TRUEHEART

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INTERVIEW

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you first become interested in foreign affairs?

TRUEHEART: Really any serious interest developed during the war, when I was involved in intelligence in various ways.

Q: What types of things were you doing then?

TRUEHEART: When I was still a graduate student in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia, I took a correspondence course which one of my professors had organized with the Navy, a correspondence course in cryptanalysis. This was before we got in the war. After Pearl Harbor, the ten of us who had been taking this course--in fact, had completed it--were all promptly offered a job in Washington in the Navy, with the promise of a commission. I never got the commission, although I came to work as a civilian, because of my eyesight. I did work as a cryptanalyst for most of 1942, and found it a very cloying occupation. Eventually I said, "I'm going to join the Army and get out of this."

So I resigned from the Navy and gave up my deferments and joined the Army as a private, volunteering, thinking I would get out of this cryptanalysis. Of course, the first thing the Army did was to identify me as a cryptanalyst and sent me into Air Corps basic training, but with occupational specialty as a cryptanalyst. The only way I could escape this was to get to Officer Candidate School. So I did manage this, and became a field artillery officer after OCS at Fort Sill, and had about a year in field artillery. Eventually,

they pulled me back to Washington to what was called the Special Branch, which was the part of Army intelligence which dealt with the products of cryptanalysis. I worked in this, actually, during the war, producing intelligence on the Japanese Army.

After the war was over, they shifted me to another publication which they had in the G-2 called the Diplomatic Summary. I was the editor. I had been the editor of a Japanese Army publication, then they made me editor of this Diplomatic Summary, which was a daily publication. Of course, this was very much current and political intelligence. There wasn't anything like this in the State Department at that time. The State Department was reading my publications, as well as the White House, and there were numerous people who later were in the Department who were contributors to my magazine. But in any case, when I was eligible to get out of the Army, they made me an offer I couldn't refuse as a civilian, so I worked for a year or two on this same publication as a civilian.

We're now in the 1946-47 period. In 1946, they sent me to Paris to the Peace Conference, and throughout the Peace Conference in Paris I briefed members of the delegation. Jimmy Dunn was the senior Foreign Service person. Although I was a Department of the Army civilian, I was briefing them daily on the materials that we were being sent in the way this was always done--through special channels to a special military section in the embassy. So you asked how I got interested in foreign affairs. That's how.

Q: You really had quite considerable experience, then, in a view of the overall diplomatic world, the world of foreign affairs.

TRUEHEART: In 1947, by this time they were setting up the Atomic Energy Commission. Friends of mine, lawyers who had been in this Army unit which I'd been in, which was almost all New York lawyers, I was one of the few who wasn't, but they were the principal lawyers in the Atomic Energy Commission. They decided that they needed to have an intelligence unit in the Atomic Energy Commission, so they brought me over to set up such a unit. I worked at that for two years. I wasn't the ultimate head of it, but I did organize it. It's one of the things I really think was a great mistake. I don't think, in retrospect, that they should have had an intelligence unit in the Atomic Energy Commission, but they had one and they still have one. (Laughs)

In the process, I participated in the drafting of all the National Security Council intelligence directives (NSCIDs) which were what governed the operations of the new intelligence community, so to speak. I was involved, also, in the setting-up of the Air Force program to monitor the air for evidence of atomic explosions. It seemed to me at the time an enormous budget--$45 million. (Laughs)

Q: In those days, that was big money.

TRUEHEART: I really wasn't very happy with this Atomic Energy thing, and my friend Park Armstrong, who had been one of my colleagues in the Army Special Branch, by that time was the head of intelligence in the Department, the so-called R area. He invited me

to come over and be his special assistant. This was the fall of 1949. As a matter of fact, I moved over there, and it was just about a week after I moved that the Russians' first atomic test took place, after I'd left the Atomic Energy business.

I worked with Park Armstrong as his assistant, but my job was not in the substance of intelligence. I was not a research person at all. My job was really assisting him in his broader functions of liaison with the other intelligence agencies in the government and as a member of what was then called the Intelligence Advisory Committee and, in general, with the overall management problems of the State Department's intelligence setup.

Q: Looking at it from today's viewpoint, how effective do you think the State Department intelligence apparatus was for getting information to the right people to use it?

TRUEHEART: I think it was very good, but bear in mind that I was not on the receiving end of this. I was not in a geographic bureau. It was a period in which there was still a great deal of feeling in the geographic bureaus that they should have these very knowledgeable people working in the geographic bureaus, rather than separately. There was a constant battle as to whether this intelligence research unit, which was the heart of it, then called INR, which, of course, had been the research and analysis unit of the OSS, from the very beginning there were disputes about whether it should be broken up. The talented people involved--no one questioned their abilities and so on--many felt should be put into the geographic bureaus as an additional asset for those bureaus.

It was a decision of General Marshall, Secretary of State, that intelligence should be kept separate. I think he was probably guided by his military experience--in the Army intelligence is a separate thing and mustn't be allowed to be contaminated by operational considerations.

There's no doubt that there were many extremely able people in that organization, and they had an institutional memory and files and so on, which were a tremendous asset to the Department. Unfortunately, the Department never had the budget to support the organization, so it became smaller and smaller, and they lost people because of budgetary restraint.

At one point during my time there, we had to give up the biographical intelligence unit altogether. We just transferred it, en bloc, to the CIA, simply because it was better than doing an across-the-board cut of everything in the Department.

Q: How good was the cooperation with the CIA?

TRUEHEART: I think there was good cooperation, but there was great rivalry, as well. The bureaucratic fight at that period was, of course, that the CIA was supposed to be a coordinator, but not a basic producer of analytic intelligence, so, at least, they thought in the State Department. I think the military felt the same way. They could produce raw information and so on, but the analysis of political and economic intelligence should be

done by the State Department, and analysis of the military intelligence should be done by the Army or the Navy. So there was a real turf war going on for years and, for all I know, it still exists.

Q: I imagine it probably still does exist.

TRUEHEART: The production of the national intelligence estimate and so on was the way in which this was resolved, in part, and this sort of thing didn't come about until after I first arrived in the Department in 1949. I worked in that role.

Then another thing that I did personally about this time, very shortly after I arrived, there was a great to-do about two Russian defectors who came over in Vienna. They were non-commissioned officers in the Russian Army, and they were brought to the United States and treated just the wrong way. They were given sort of a hero's welcome and taken, as I remember, on guided tours of Skyline Drive and all sorts of things. The next thing somebody knew, they said they wanted to go back. So they were taken back to Vienna and ceremoniously handed back to the Russian commander there. It was then decided that we had to have a better method of dealing with defectors. Of course, an Inter-Agency Defector Committee was then established, and I became the State Department member of the committee, one of the many times when I've been thrown into jobs which I had no preparation for.

Q: You happened to be walking down the hall at the right time.

TRUEHEART: I was in the right place organizationally. In any case, I stayed on this committee until I finally left the Department and went abroad.

Q: What was our policy toward defectors then? How did it develop?

TRUEHEART: The problem was, of course, that the defector was accepted as being a prime source of information. On the other hand, from an operational point of view of the CIA clandestine service, a defector was, first and foremost, a possible agent. Instead of having him come over and debriefing him, you could send him back in or leave him in place, so to speak, and he could, at least theoretically, be a lot more valuable in that role.

So the committee was concerned with devising procedures which would make sure that all the agencies got maximum opportunity to debrief the defectors. It was also concerned with providing procedures to be applied in the embassies abroad, where the defector might first appear, where the possibility existed to have the CIA have this operational role. Finally, of course, the thing that concerned them in the first instance was to make sure that once you had the defector, that you treated him in the right way so that he could be not only debriefed, but rehabilitated and introduced into society, either in this country or abroad.

We established various facilities for doing this. We had a very fine installation, I remember, near Wiesbaden, where defectors could be housed and debriefed and trained and whatnot. Nevertheless, there were many different kinds of problems. I was mostly concerned with the operational ones, of how to rehabilitate, resettle, prevent the kind of debacle that had brought about the creation of the committee. But there were very many strong disputes between the Agency and the Army and Navy, particularly, about the use of these defectors, and whether the Army or the Navy were actually being cut out of access to this or that specific defector.

Q: We're talking about 1954, when you entered the Foreign Service.

TRUEHEART: I came into the Department as a civil servant. My colleague, as special assistant to Park Armstrong, was a man named Howard Furness. In about 1952, USRO [U.S. mission to the Regional Organizations] was set up in Paris. It sort of succeeded the [Averell] Harriman mission. I forget the name of the man, a very prominent New York guy, who was made the first head of this joint mission. In any case, he set up this really top-heavy bureaucracy in Paris. There were five ambassadors. Of course, there was an ambassador to France, and then this man was the ambassador to all the organizations, the OECD, NATO, and so forth. He had under him a Treasury representative, who had the rank of ambassador, a Defense Department representative who had the rank of ambassador, a USIA representative, if I remember correctly, with the rank of ambassador, and I guess an AID type. There they were, five ambassadors in the Talleyrand, which was the building in Paris. This man had a very grandiose idea of what his mission was. It was really more than simply representing the United States in these various regional organizations. He conceived of his role as being a sort of pro-consul and being supervisor of the missions in each of the countries in Europe. This he never achieved, but that was the idea. He also decided that he needed to have a special assistant for intelligence, who was going to be his contact and access to the most classified sorts of intelligence. My colleague, Howard Furness, got this job and went to Paris. He stayed there from 1952 to '54, and when he decided he wanted to give it up, I was going to succeed him, and I did.

Meanwhile, I had concluded I wanted to go in the Foreign Service, and had talked to all sorts of people and made my application for lateral entry. I had resigned myself to taking a reduction in grade in order to do this. It happened that just about this time, the Wriston program was being developed, so that I didn't have to take any reduction. As a matter of fact, I went to Paris in September of '54, and in about November, a telegram came through. I think the first three people Wristonized were Graham Martin, Lane Timmons, and me. They were both brought in as Class 1, and I was Class 2. So I had a very easy time, so to speak, in my Foreign Service life, starting out as that level. In my job in Paris, I had an office next to the ambassador and DCM. The Ambassador by this time, was Hughes. Hughes had been brought in with the mission of trying to cut this organization back to some sort of size, and I think by this time he was the only ambassador. The others were ministers by this time. His deputy at this point was Edwin M. Martin. I sat in a little office next to them and really reported only to them, and briefed them on this intelligence material which, I guess, only the three of us were cleared for.

This was not much of a job, frankly, and I asked if we couldn't abolish it and let me go into the political section and do ordinary political work. They agreed, and so I moved down to the political section and stayed there for the remainder of my four years in Paris. The last couple of years, I was the deputy head of the political section of the delegation to NATO.

Q: What were our concerns with NATO at the time you were there, from your perspective?

TRUEHEART: By this time, 1954 to '58, our concerns were at the council level, not talking about the purely military side. In a substantive way, one of the main functions was the so-called annual report, which was a matter of planning for expenditures and infrastructure of the alliance, burden sharing, who was going to pay for it, and so forth. This had become a very formalized mechanism, and we were trying to prevail upon our allies to do their share, but we had, in general, good cooperation. We were trying to build a pipeline, for example, for the NATO forces, and this created many problems with the French and so on, and there were great questions about who was going to pay for it, who would have title to it, if and when the pipeline were no longer needed by the military, and so forth. Many problems of that kind.

I must say my memory isn't what it should be, but, of course, we had weekly meetings of the North Atlantic Council. My role was normally to go to that and take the notes and write the telegram accordingly. It was a period when we were involved in disarmament discussions with the Soviet Union, and we had to coordinate our position within NATO. The head of our disarmament negotiations was Harold Stassen. I remember vividly his coming to a meeting of the Council and briefing the Council on what he proposed the U.S. position should be. I was most impressed, by the way, with his articulateness, his really great intelligence. He obviously was a brilliant man. He had everything in the disarmament package at his fingertips. But it was not long after this that he went to London for some other meetings. I've forgotten now what it was, but he took some position in dealings with the Russians that was not in his brief, and Dulles, very shortly after this, forced his resignation. He was the head of an organization which doesn't exist today. That was one of the kinds of things we dealt with, but there was always a full agenda every week. We were constantly trying to coordinate or at least to keep our allies informed of U.S. policies, in general, because that was what we had undertaken to do.

Q: Were the French any more difficult than the British or others? Does that particularly stand out?

TRUEHEART: Yes, I think, clearly, the French were always the most difficult to deal with. I think we simply didn't understand how to deal with them as well as we did the British, for example. This was before the time of De Gaulle, of course. I left, incidentally, just before De Gaulle returned to power. But I think the French always felt that we had a special relationship with the British and resented this, and were much more suspicious, I

think, of anything that was being done or that we were proposing, than the British were. Of course, much of the actions we were taking were actions taking place on French soil. Their general position, I think, was that their monetary contributions to NATO infrastructure and so on would not exceed how much of the results were carried out in France, not very different from many states in the United States who look at slicing the pie much the same way. The French could be very adamant about this sort of thing.

Q: In 1958, you were then assigned to Ankara as assistant to the secretary general of the Baghdad Pact.

TRUEHEART: Yes. I'd had four years in Paris and it was time for a change. I really was hoping that I'd be assigned back to the Department in the bureau that looked after NATO. But the Baghdad Pact had been set up, and the United States was never a member of the Baghdad Pact, but we did have representation on the international staff. In fact, the top position on the international staff, the executive assistant to the secretary general, was a U.S. slot. It had been held by an American, and his tour was up. It was thought by somebody or other that it would be good to send me to this job because I would be able to bring to the Baghdad Pact secretariat my knowledge of how NATO operated. It was a new organization, supposedly similar--not really very similar. So I got this assignment.

In the summer of '58, I had everything packed to go, but in the mission in Baghdad, David Fritzlan was the DCM--whom I see every day now--and he said that he thought that perhaps I ought to slow down a bit, that the Baghdad Pact was having a ministerial meeting in London in July of 1958, and that I would have to go to London for this meeting, and most of the staff of the Baghdad Pact would be going to the meeting. So it would be simpler if, instead of bringing my family out there and returning immediately to London, I might just stay in Paris, go to London for this meeting, and then proceed to Baghdad after the meeting. This is what I did.

I went over a few days early to London. I remember vividly, Monday the 14th of July, which is the day I was to report for duty, I went down to the British offices where the Baghdad Pact had been assigned, reported to the secretary general, who was an Iraqi. But that was the day Nuri Said was killed and the King, and the government was overthrown in Iraq. I found the secretary general in a state of shock. So I never went to Baghdad. We spent several months in London in the secretariat, waiting to see what was going to happen. Finally, the Turks said they would accept the organization. So I went out with a Turkish colleague to look over the facilities, where the Turks were going to put us and so on, then came back, and we took the whole crew out to Ankara.

By this time we had a new secretary general, a Pakistani. I stayed really less than a year on this job.

Q: How was the Baghdad Pact just before the downfall of the Iraqi government? How was it viewed from the NATO point of view? Was this looked upon as something that really wasn't much of a factor?

TRUEHEART: I don't know for sure what NATO thought about it. I didn't think anything of it, and I thought it was a rather silly idea which wasn't going to accomplish anything, and I wasn't keen to get involved with it. But I knew nothing about the area; I never served in the Middle East. One of the things I did while I was there was to bring one or two others, people on the secretariat, to Paris to touch base with the secretariat of NATO and see what we could learn about the ways they operated. But there was no comparison in any way between the two organizations. So it really amounted to very little. And there was very little to do. They had no unified commands like NATO or anything of the sort, although they did have a military committee with lieutenant generals from each of the member countries, and a major general from the United States on this committee. But it was really a facade, I think. Of course, the members, for the most part, did not really accept the fundamental point--which is the main difference with NATO--that the principal threat to them was from the Soviet Union. For the most part, they saw their principal threats as other things. The Pakistanis obviously thought the Indians were the problem. There just wasn't this acceptance of what Dulles saw as the real objective of the Pact.
I left rather prematurely. Perhaps I could tell this little tale. I was on the international staff reporting to the secretary general, who was a very accomplished Pakistani diplomat, M.O.A. Baig, by name. He'd been their ambassador to Canada, and his brother was the secretary general of the Pakistani foreign ministry. He was a remarkable man, and I was very fond of him. Of course, I was reporting to him, and it was understood that he was my boss. On the other hand, there was sort of a tacit understanding, that I was supposed to be keeping the embassy informed about what was going on in the secretariat. I didn't find this a difficult thing to do, and I went to the staff meetings at the embassy and so on.

In any case, Mr. Baig had decided he was going to make some reorganization of the staff of the secretariat, and I didn't think it was a very good idea. I forget what it was; it wasn't very important. I mentioned this to him. And, at one of the Embassy staff meetings, I reported on this, and indicated to the embassy that I didn't think much of the planned change. We had a new DCM in the embassy at the time coming from Mexico or somewhere, but in any case, not long after this, he was talking to Mr. Baig at a reception and volunteered that he understood Trueheart didn't think much of his plan. (Laughs) Well, Baig confronted me with this, of course, quite rightly. I was about to go on home leave, and I said I really thought this was a serious matter, and I was sorry about it, but I thought perhaps the simplest thing would be, when I went on home leave, if I simply didn't return, have a quiet change. He agreed with this, and I thought it suited my book very well.

So we went on home leave, and I had the good fortune to be assigned to London.

Q: What were your principal concerns in London? You went there as a political officer in 1959 to 1961.

TRUEHEART: I was a political-military officer, also following Atomic Energy, which is perhaps the reason I got the job because of my previous experience with Atomic Energy. I succeeded Howard Meyers, who had been mostly on Atomic Energy. I did very little on that. I was mainly concerned with our base problems with the British, our base agreements. I was involved in the agreements for the Thor missiles; I was liaison with the Seventh Air Force, which at that time had very strong bomber forces, B-47s, in England; I was involved with the establishment of the agreements on the Holy Loch installation, the nuclear submarines in Scotland, with the missile-detection operations in Fylingdale Moor.

All these negotiations were carried out mainly in London, rather than in Washington. We in the embassy wanted to keep things this way. The British, perhaps, would have preferred to do it in Washington, but we had a strong mission then. Most of the time, Jock Whitney was the ambassador and Wally Barbour was the DCM. Just at the end of my time, David Bruce took over. I was quite busy. I was in the political section, but after I left, this political-military operation became a separate unit in the embassy.

Q: This was not long after the Suez Crisis, where everything had stopped between the United States and the British for a while. Was that a factor anymore, or had relations been pretty well put together?

TRUEHEART: I would say there was really no particular fallout from that, except that perhaps the British were very keen not to have anything further that would damage their special relationship. The possibility that their special relationship could be affected was very much in their minds. For example, this was a period when the Air Force was talking about something called the Skybolt missile. This was towards the end of my stay. It was to be an air-launched missile. This thing never became operational, but from the British point of view, it was going to be a weapon which they would have no part in, there would be no basing involved with England, and they would not have any knowledge of it.

In the end, at a meeting in Bermuda shortly after I left England, we agreed to let the British in on the Polaris submarine. This was, in effect, a way of keeping them in the game. They were very concerned about anything which would make them less a player in the U.S. strategic military position.

Q: I'm not sure of the exact timing, but there had been a series of rather well-publicized defections, Burgess and McLean and all, of people going to the Soviet Union, who had been involved in British intelligence. I don't think Kim Philby had at that point. But were you concerned that whatever you gave to the British, talking about military, that this might somehow be compromised because of that type of defection?

TRUEHEART: I think the McLean business was afterwards.

Q: It may well have been. So this was not a concern on the intelligence side?

TRUEHEART: At this point, I was not involved in any sort of intelligence, although I still had my clearances and whatnot. I was not conscious of this as a problem at all. The main thing was the political fallout from the various base agreements that we were trying to develop with the British.

Another big problem of the time was that we had a civilian nuclear-powered ship.
Q: Savannah.

TRUEHEART: Yes, which we wanted to bring into British ports. We could never get an agreement with the British on this, because although we brought submarines in, we had no way of providing adequate insurance for possible damage from a big accident in a British port. That's really why the Savannah never got anywhere, anyway. Nobody was going to let this vessel come in. We had an act of Congress, which limited the liability coverage to something like $500 million for such an accident, and that was obviously totally inadequate if one of these ships put Liverpool out of action. On the other hand, it was thought that a nuclear submarine, being a naval vessel, the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government was behind it and we could be expected to compensate in full for any damage done. In any case, that was another thing that I struggled with.

There were communications problems in which our military was trying to do things with communications. The British Postal Service, which handled all their communications, were very concerned. I've forgotten the details, but it was a very interesting assignment which I enjoyed very much. I would not have left it unless I had been offered a DCM job in Saigon.

Q: How did you get this assignment? You were DCM in Saigon from 1961 to '64, which in many ways was the crucial period in our relations.

TRUEHEART: Ambassador Nolting asked for me, as simple as that. I had worked for him briefly in Paris, but I'd know him. We were in school together. He was older than I, but he was a very close friend. Going back, his father set up my father in business many years ago. As I think is well known, this beautiful friendship came to an end in Saigon. It's been written about, but I don't particularly want to go into this.

Q: You have already done a rather thorough interview for the LBJ Library on this, which we'll make reference to in the transcript.

TRUEHEART: I also had a long interview with one of your professors here at Georgetown, a priest. I think he's writing a book.

Q: Did he put this into transcript form?

TRUEHEART: That I don't know, but we did have a long talk. I can't remember whether it was recorded or not.

Q: In that interview, did they ask you about the operating style of Henry Cabot Lodge?

TRUEHEART: Yes, I think that's touched on in that interview. Bear in mind I was only there during his first tour. I was there when he arrived. I was very impressed by the way in which he took over in a very difficult period and very quickly. I got on with him famously myself. I think other people had many difficulties at later times, but I thought that his ability to take charge in a very complicated situation was something I could hardly imagine anyone doing. He was also a man with great ability to write, draft, persuade. He made an excellent reporting officer. I think this is reflected in that transcript.

Q: How did you feel when you left? This had been a complicated time? How do you feel this affected you?

TRUEHEART: I left, because about the time Lodge got there, I got a letter from Roger Hilsman, asking me if I would be interested in coming back and being in charge of Southeast Asian affairs, which included Vietnam. I think his idea at the time was to make this position a deputy assistant secretary position, as well. I thought this was a good opportunity, and I had been in Saigon for more than two years. Lodge agreed that if I thought it was a good career move, he would [approve]. So I helped him with finding somebody else. In any case, that was what was planned.

Then we had the November 1963 coup. I didn't leave until January. I took a long leave on the way back. I took at least a month's leave and went to India, had two weeks in Egypt, then I went to London, then I took a ship from London. While I was doing this, there was another coup in Saigon.

I've never known exactly what lay behind all this, but by the time I got back, Hilsman was on his way out. I got back about the first of March. Two things happened. They had taken Vietnam out of the Office of Southeast Asian Affairs and had a special task force on this, so that I became Director of Southeast Asian Affairs, but I had, as I always used to say, "the dominoes" only. I had Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma, but I didn't have Vietnam, which is the only place I knew what little I knew about the area.

Incidentally, when I went to Saigon, I had never, prior to that, been west of Chicago, which is typical of my Foreign Service career. I never went anywhere where I had any [experience].

In any case, Bill Bundy took over within two weeks after I got back, and I stayed in this job for a couple of years. I got along well enough with Bundy, who was a classmate of mine, as a matter of fact, and a good deal more comfortable man to work with than Hilsman. But I didn't really have any role in Vietnam after returning, and was rather glad I didn't, since I was totally out of sympathy with the policies that were being followed, particularly in further U.S. military involvement there.

Q: This was in the period of '65, when the decision was made for the insertion of major American forces. What was Bundy's role at this point, as you saw it?

TRUEHEART: I think Bill Bundy and the ISA man in the Pentagon, who was tragically killed in an airplane accident, I would say they were the two principal operating officers, the people who really wrote the papers on implementing the policy of gradual escalation and the political direction for our operations in Vietnam.

Q: Was there much disagreement within the staff there about where we should go?

TRUEHEART: There were very strong disagreements, starting from George Ball. I did have some involvement in the development of some papers we prepared, which Ball had been invited to prepare. Johnson and Rusk allowed him to be the family dissenter in all this, and Ball asked Bundy if it would be all right if I participated with him during preparing papers or whatever. I did, although I must say that I never had any particular solutions to this problem, other than to get out. I never saw any miraculous way to produce a negotiated solution to the problem. I did sit in on many discussions of this. I'm sure that, for that matter, Bill Bundy would have been happy to--and I certainly told Bill and others in the bureau, they knew what I thought about this idea. It wasn't a solution that was acceptable to the President and, for all I know, anybody else for a long time to come.

Q: You mentioned that you were in charge of "the dominoes." For the record, we're referring to what was known as the domino theory, that if Vietnam fell, then Cambodia, then Laos, then Thailand, Burma, India, and all would fall such as dominoes. This was a major argument for our holding the line in Vietnam. How did you and your staff feel about looking at this? Did you feel these were dominoes that would be likely to turn into communist-controlled countries?

TRUEHEART: That wasn't really the issue. Those were the basic sort of assumptions underlying the things we were doing in Vietnam, but what we were trying to do was to make sure, as far as we could, that the war wasn't allowed to spill over into Cambodia and into Laos, particularly, and to limit the kinds of actions which were being taken in Laos, and which I never objected to, given the war going on, the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and all this sort of thing, provided we had the kind of controls on targeting and so on, which we certainly did, I think, working through the ambassador in Vientiane, pretty tight controls on what targets were to be struck in Laos. They were targets on Vietnamese in Laos. I certainly objected very strongly to any actions which would take us across the border into Cambodia, on the ground that this would simply widen the battlefield and in no way solve the problem. I think, actually, the eventual incursion into Cambodia took place after I left my job.

Q: We went in, in the spring of 1970.

TRUEHEART: By this time, I had gone to the Senior Seminar and had come back as Deputy Director of INR.

Q: In your area of responsibility, did you have Indonesia?

TRUEHEART: No. By that time, Indonesia and Philippines were separate. There was a time when Southeast Asia, or SEA, included the whole bunch. But sometime much earlier than my time, there was a separate office for Indonesia, Philippines, and, I think, Australia.

Q: You said that outside of your service in Saigon, you were not familiar with the area, and you had the responsibility for these other countries. How did you find your staff?

TRUEHEART: Excellent.

Q: Good expertise?

TRUEHEART: Yes.

Q: Were they caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment? How did the people whom you were relying on to give you information react?

TRUEHEART: They were a very talented group of people. Some were more talented or more useful than others, but I'd just as soon not do any efficiency reports in this interview.

Q: I would like to get a feel for it.

TRUEHEART: They were all people, I would say, who obviously had a lot more experience and knowledge of these countries than I did. That could have hardly been otherwise. The Laotian desk, I think we had three people on that desk, was an extremely busy operation not only because of the military operations going on there, trying to keep a lid on it, but also because of the extreme fragility of the political situation on our side. All these names I find difficult to remember now, but in other words, it was an extremely busy job, keeping track of what was going on there.

Q: Did we have the expertise at that point to give you good, solid judgment?

TRUEHEART: Oh, yes. The INR backup and our relations with the CIA on what they were doing there and so on, were all extremely good and close. I was constantly in touch with the CIA on their very active operations in Laos. So I had no problems of that kind.

Q: Did you feel that there were pressures coming from the White House and Bundy, of, "Let's do something"? How about from the military?

TRUEHEART: Yes, going back to when I was in Saigon, the feeling there certainly was that Cambodians and Sihanouk were facilitating the Viet Cong, and that we ought to do something about it. That would be the natural instinct when you're trying to fight a battle there.

My views on all this changed radically after I got back here and could see the thing from a broader point of view. At least I'd like to think I saw it from a broader point of view. I remember that one of the very last telegrams I wrote in 1966, I guess, when I think we had a telegram from Ambassador Lodge, then on his second tour there, which was proposing that, in effect, we ought to take action into Cambodia. I wrote a two-page telegram arguing that this was not a wise thing to do, that it would not accomplish the objective, and would, in fact, simply make a bigger battlefield, and would not simplify things or lead to the conclusion that was wanted. I remember that we actually were able to get both [Dean] Rusk and [Robert] McNamara to initial this message.

So I left my post, feeling that I had had a little effect and had kept the guys out of there for a while, anyway.

Q: For about three years or so.

TRUEHEART: I think later it was well documented that Sihanoukville, a port in Cambodia, was actually being used as a port of entry for military supplies. But I don't think this was going on in 1966, or if it was, we did not have evidence of this. But there wasn't any doubt about the Ho Chi Minh Trail being extended a little bit down around the bend there through Cambodia, as well as through Laos. I really have the vaguest recollections of these things.

Q: You went to the Senior Seminar from 1966 to 1967. Then you spent two years as Deputy Director for Coordination in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. What did that mean?

TRUEHEART: The Deputy Director for Coordination is a position which, until the Kennedy Administration, had been a separate unit. It originally was set up by Bob Joyce. He was the first holder of the position. It reported to the Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs. When it first started, it was "Doc" Matthews or Robert Murphy who had that job. It was specifically not a part of the intelligence area of the Department originally, and this, I think, had been insisted on by Allen Dulles or others, because it was an operational job, had nothing to do with the research parts of the CIA or anything else. It was policy guidance for operational activities of the CIA.

Q: This is the State Department's input into what we should be trying to accomplish.

TRUEHEART: Yes, and clearance of operations which the CIA wanted to undertake, and later, also, the whole gamut of military reconnaissance, including, in my day, much of this

flying of planes very close to the border to check radar reactions and that sort of thing, plus the whole business of satellite reconnaissance.

At the time of the Kennedy Administration, this unit was incorporated into INR, and I reported to the Director, Tom Hughes. It was also clearly understood that I reported actively and directly to the deputy under secretary.

Q: In a way, it looks like the older system made more sense, because you really were an arm of the political policy operation, rather than intelligence.

TRUEHEART: That's true, and it was kept quite distinct from the rest of INR, and I guess it still is. These inter-agency boards had various names, at one time 303 Committee and later other names, but these committees, in effect, set policy on operational secret operations and covert action and so on. The U.S. representative on these committees was the deputy under secretary. When I first came, it was Foy Kohler, later, briefly, Chip Bohlen, then Alexis Johnson. I worked directly with them. Of course, I kept Hughes fully informed on all this. I had some other functions, like liaison with the FBI on clearance of their surveillance of diplomats and whatnot. But my contacts and those of the people in my unit were mostly with the geographic bureaus, rather than with the research offices of INR. On reconnaissance, for example, we had a monthly book that was this thick, of proposed reconnaissance operations to take place. I had a man full-time in the Pentagon, sitting with the Joint Reconnaissance Center. So it was all that sort of thing, again fascinating stuff. Here, perhaps, I did have a little more background, given my political-military experience.

Q: This is, obviously, an unclassified interview, but did you find yourself in the role of saying to either an over-eager CIA or over-eager military, "That's not a good idea politically"? That seems to be the role that the State Department is cast in.

TRUEHEART: Yes. This certainly occurred from time to time. It happens that when I came into this job, it was just after something called the Katzenbach Report. Katzenbach was the under secretary. There had been a terrible flap in about 1966 or early '67, in which it leaked out that the CIA had been supporting the National Student Association, in effect, funding their operations to send representatives abroad. Everybody thought at the time that this was a hell of a good idea. It enabled our students to deal with the Russian students in these international events.

Q: In those days, the Russian students were running in the mid-thirties or so, I think.

TRUEHEART: In any case, they were certainly being fully funded by their government. But it blew up. Johnson appointed a committee, which consisted of Katzenbach and Dick Helms, the head of the CIA, and I forget who the third one was, but I think he was a former Justice of the Supreme Court. In any case, this committee concluded that we could no longer, in a country like this, clandestinely fund--what was it called?

Q: National Student Association.

TRUEHEART: There were a lot of other things that we had been involved with, some which were useful. But like a newspaper, we couldn't do it. So when I came into this job, the first thing to deal with was phasing out a whole array of things which were obviously covered by this Katzenbach policy.

My point, basically, is that at the same time I came in, the CIA was sort of very much on the defensive, and were not so much putting forward new ideas as trying to clear up what they had. But there was one thing which was really big that was affected by this, and this was the Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. What was to be done about these? Because technically they were very much covered by the same policy. There was a lot of money involved. Their annual budgets were, together--I forget now--but well over $30 million a year at that time. In fact, the budgets of these two organizations were a good deal bigger than the budget for the whole Voice of America, and it was all coming out of the CIA pocket.

So we had to decide what to do about these things. Should they be phased out and just let them go? Should they be retained? If they should be retained, how are you going to do it? This was the main substantive new job I had at the time I took over, because I was told by Foy Kohler to set up a committee and come up with an answer, and I did. That was the inter-agency committee, an ad hoc group, and I made a trip to Munich, talked to the people there and looked over these things. We came up with solutions, not the ones that were eventually adopted. I must say I didn't believe at the time that you could ever get Congress to appropriate the kind of money that was involved for these operations. That proved to be a mistake in judgment. But we did recommend that they not be phased out, and had a lot of studies done as to why they shouldn't be. I guess it turned out to be the right decision.

Q: Part of the feeling at the time, if I recall, was that the CIA was financing some things which were not really covert organizations, but it was a handy way of getting around budgetary problems with Congress, and it just happened to be a rather deep pocket in which the government could draw on, without having to go through all sorts of congressional oversight and budgetary problems. Is this a fair statement?

TRUEHEART: That was true. But on the other hand, it was also possible to fund without having the hand of the U.S. showing. I think nobody doubted that the United States was funding Radio Free Europe.

Q: There were voluntary subscriptions to it.

TRUEHEART: This was one of the problems, because the people who had been involved over the years in raising money, I think many of them perhaps thought that it was fully supported by these public subscriptions.

We had all these operations going on in Germany. We had the transmitters in Portugal and Spain. At least the conventional wisdom was that if it were publicly known that the U.S. Government, the CIA, or whoever, was supporting these anti-Soviet, anti-communist operations, that we would lose our transmitters and that the Germans wouldn't be willing to let these open operations go on. This proved not to be true.

Q: In 1969, you were appointed as ambassador to Nigeria at really a critical time. How did this appointment come about? You had never served in Africa.

TRUEHEART: It's typical in that sense. I'm normally sent to places I never served or had any experience in. In this case, I think it's worth mentioning just what the circumstances were. I was working directly with Alexis Johnson, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. The time had come for assignments of people, and I happen to know that they had thought to send me to Kenya, which was a good deal less troublesome spot in many ways, and in many ways a much more pleasant spot. They were going to send Robinson McIlvaine to Nigeria. Nigeria was a Class 1 post, the only one in Africa. McIlvaine had had about three embassies in West Africa, and had some very unpleasant physical living and whatnot. He preferred not to go to Nigeria, so they shifted him to Kenya and sent me to Nigeria. It doesn't suggest there was any special rationale for it. I had been in difficult spots before, but I really had no background in Africa and had not been involved, even peripherally, in the great debates about the Biafra War.

Q: This was 1969. The Biafra War was at its height at this point.

TRUEHEART: As it proved to be, it was nearly ending, but certainly nobody was predicting it was about to end. I didn't realize, when I was assigned there, exactly how difficult the position was in Washington, because there was a drastic split in views between the White House and the State Department.

Q: Could you discuss what the situation was and what the problem was from the Washington angle?

TRUEHEART: From the Washington point of view, you had this dreadful famine in Nigeria, especially in Biafra, and the Biafrans, which were fundamentally the Ibo tribe, had many friends in this country. They had many of their own people, who had been students here. That happens to be also the part of Africa which is strongest in the Roman Catholic tradition. The Roman Catholic Church was much the strongest in eastern Nigeria, whereas the Protestants had the western part. The northern part is Moslem. It was a serious and very curious domestic political issue.
We're talking about the beginning of the Nixon Administration. Before the inauguration, Mrs. Nixon had participated in a big rally in New York at St. Patrick's, the big cathedral, for Biafra. There was a Foreign Service officer, or former Foreign Service officer, a young one, named Roger Morris, who was on the NSC, and who was a strong partisan of Biafra. At the same time, in the State Department there was the general support for maintaining the unity of Nigeria, the biggest country and population in Africa. It's said

that one out of every four Africans lives in Nigeria. This was always regarded as the great test of whether there could be a really strong African country. Furthermore, we had been strong supporters of the federal government since independence in 1961. But there was this split.

I forgot to mention that another of the strong supporters of Biafra was Senator Kennedy. So it was a very curious mix.

Q: I'm told, also, that there was a strong liberal Jewish group, too, which saw some correlation between the Moslem north swallowing up this country, correlating it to Israel. This seemed to strike a responsive chord there.

TRUEHEART: If so, I never was aware of this. Of course, while I was in Nigeria, the Israelis had an embassy in Lagos. And they were involved in the support of Biafra.

We had taken a very curious position as a government; we had said we would be neutral in this matter. Of course, to the Nigerian Government, being neutral in a conflict to secede, in effect, was hardly neutral in their minds. We had carried this to the point where we would not even supply spare parts, for example, for weapons which we had provided the federal government under military assistance in the past. So by the time I got there, our relations with the federal government were very cool.

Q: Was there any problem with confirmation? I assume that many of these people, including Senator Kennedy, but other supporters of Biafra, would be examining your "mental credentials," or whatever you want to call it, of where you stood on this. Did you find this a problem?

TRUEHEART: No. Confirmation proceedings were perfunctory. Perhaps my known ignorance was a real asset. But in any case, there wasn't any problem about this. They asked a few perfunctory questions, but no serious questions. I'm sure that Senator Kennedy did not show up for the hearings. I don't think he was on the committee. In any case, there wasn't any problem of that kind.

There was this serious split in the government here about what our policy should be, and it very much affected my work when I got there, because, again, it was something like the situation I'd seen earlier in Vietnam when I had been chargé. When you got a telegram from Washington, you had to think very hard, "Which department did this one come from?" It really was that bad. The in-fighting was extreme.

I remember on one occasion after the war had ended, but there was still a great debate here and fight about aid to the former Biafra area, sending a telegram. David Newsom was the assistant secretary at the time. He had a hearing on the Hill. Leaving at 8:00 in the morning from the Department, he had a batch of telegrams to read, and he read some telegrams, including one from me, on recommendations or whatever. He got to the hearing, and the telegram was read aloud to him by the chairman of the hearing. This was

the kind of thing that was going on. I think there's no question at all that Roger Morris, in the White House, was systematically passing information to this committee--I think this was Senator Kennedy's Committee on Refugees--to use in interrogating the State Department. This was the problem back here.

In Nigeria, of course, I found a very cool relationship, indeed. They let me cool my heels for a month before presenting my credentials. In years past, in the early days of independence, there had been a very friendly relationship, indeed, between the United States and Nigeria. We had sent out a commission to help them write their Constitution--a very cozy relationship, indeed. Long before I got there, that was gone. I don't think it's ever recovered. Maybe it's just as well that it hasn't. It was a very unhappy tour of duty, in my opinion, because there was nothing I could do, and I was constantly being pressed to do things from back here that were not feasible.

Q: Let's look at the operation. Did you have any instructions before you came out? Did the President advise you?

TRUEHEART: First of all, I didn't see the President. President Nixon didn't often see ambassadors before they went out. I've never met him, as a matter of fact. I had a normal swearing-in ceremony with Elliot Richardson. I think the Secretary was away at the time. I had no special instructions, except we were trying to maintain good relations and all that sort of thing. But the war was still going on.

I got there in September-October 1969, and the war was over in the middle of January, with the defeat of the Biafrans.

Incidentally, we had had, of course, a special relationship with the Biafrans on relief matters. There was a man named Clyde Ferguson, who was a lawyer. He had been a law professor, and he later went to Uganda as ambassador. He had been appointed as a relief coordinator. He was quasi-ambassador, in a way, to the Biafrans, although he also was, in effect, accredited to the Nigerian Government on relief matters, because there were many people who were not getting enough to eat on the Nigerian side of the line and in the area of the war. So he came to Nigeria several times while I was there, but he was also seeing the Biafrans in Geneva.

The support for the Biafrans by this time, of course, was wholly by air, and we were supplying--and this is how the Israelis came in, in one way--aircraft for the air lift to the Biafrans. These aircraft were an old Air Force tanker-type called a C-97, as I recall, which were no longer operational, but we still had a number of them out in the desert somewhere, mothballed. Each time this was done, it seems to me it was practically an act of Congress to get permission to introduce two more of these airplanes into the service. The only people who had the capability of equipping them were the Israelis, who still had this plane in service. So these planes were used for airlifting foodstuffs into Biafra. I have the strongest suspicions, without knowing it, that, in fact, the tankers were also carrying in POL, oil and gas, which the Biafrans needed. But in any case, this was all over.

Finally, I should say that the Soviet Union, of course, had outfitted the Nigerian Government, the federal government, with MiG-15s, and was generally giving them full military assistance, and so were the British. So that we were in a rather odd position in that respect, as well, vis à vis the Nigerian Government.

Q: This was really as a result of domestic pressures?

TRUEHEART: I think so, yes. Of course, as it happened, my predecessor, Burt Matthews, had been the dean of the diplomatic corps, and when he left, he was succeeded by the Soviet ambassador. (Laughs)

The Nigerian ambassador here was a very intelligent, but bitter, man, who came from the eastern part of Nigeria, but was particularly anti-Ibo, because his tribal group had been badly treated by the Ibos for centuries. He was no help to anybody in terms of our relations with the government during my brief time there. I say this all by way of background, but I found it, by all odds, even much worse than Vietnam, my worst experience in trying to carry out a policy directed from a divided Washington.

Q: You mentioned that you would get a cable of instructions and you had to figure out where it came from. How would this play out?

TRUEHEART: You carried it out. In this kind of thing, people in Washington feel that they have to get out instructions, and if by modifying the language of the instruction in such a way as to get everybody to sign on it, they've accomplished the mission. They put it on the telegram, and then at the other end, you are confronted with trying to parse this self-contradictory message, in a way. It's very difficult.

Q: Make a strong demand without hurting anyone's feelings?

TRUEHEART: I can't give you an example, but I think if I had access to the cable traffic of the period, it would be pretty obvious.

Q: So you would get these contradictory cables, and then you would work.

TRUEHEART: They would ask you to do something they knew you couldn't do, or somebody knew you couldn't do.

Q: That took care of it from Washington's point of view.

TRUEHEART: Until tomorrow.

Q: How was your staff in Nigeria at the embassy?

TRUEHEART: They were good people. My deputy, when I first went there, was Clinton Olson, who had been the DCM for two or three years before for Burt Matthews. He was extremely knowledgeable about the situation there and the situation in Washington, and was also anathema to Mr. Morris. But obviously there was this much localitis to it. Certainly everybody in the embassy was very much supportive of the federal government and believed that our support for Biafra was undermining our future relationship with this enormous and important country. It was very obvious, at least by the time I got there, that the Biafrans were going to lose. We had very good intelligence on the way the war was going, probably better than the Nigerians did, so we knew what was going on. Of course, we had a good military attaché and, as I say, excellent intelligence, an excellent CIA chief of station. All of these people were absolutely first class. I had an outstanding economic officer. I must say I didn't think my first political counselor was very good, but perhaps in retrospect, he simply had an impossible job.

Q: You say your contacts were cool. How did you deal with the Nigerians?

TRUEHEART: It wasn't easy. It was very hard. I saw the chief of state, Gowon, several times, and I had the very highest opinion of him, a remarkable man. I saw him on several occasions, usually when I was bringing a distinguished visitor to see him. The foreign minister, theoretically, at least, was always available, but not always easy to get an appointment with, and the meetings were usually ships passing in the night. I can't remember any particular incident.

I do remember coming back for consultation at one point and trying to see him before I left, on the theory that it would be nice to be able to report, when I got back here, that we had had a conversation. And he stood me up on the appointment. It was to be at his house. So it was a very unfortunate relationship. I suppose maybe somebody else could have done differently with it.

Q: When you have a policy conflict, personalities don't play much of a role in something like this.

TRUEHEART: You never know. I'm not sure what else may have been involved. I've been told that the Nigerian ambassador have reported that I was a racist of some kind. What he based this on, I have no idea, or whether he did do it. But it's clear that the ambassador here had been so embittered by his treatment in this country and by the way in which the Biafrans were being supported, he was not interested in furthering good relations between the two countries, because he knew that there was nothing he could do. The State Department really had hardly any influence in the overall situation.

I was told when I was back here in the bureau, we were talking to the under secretary, Richardson, about how this whole policy was being skewed by the White House, "You're lucky we haven't recognized Biafra."

Q: How about the economic position of Nigeria, particularly oil? Did that play much of a part?

TRUEHEART: It was just beginning, you see. While I was there, the Gulf Oil Company was the main American producer. When I first went there, it was the BP Shell group, but their operations were on shore and mostly in the Biafra area. Gulf Oil had begun to produce in the offshore areas near Port Harcourt. During my time, Mobil came on line in the area to the east of that, offshore. The really big production didn't come until a year or two later, but it was certainly on the way at this point. Of course, the oil companies were totally in support of the federal government. It was just a very bizarre affair.

Q: One of the arguments put forward was that if the Nigerian central government won, there would be an absolute massacre of the Ibos. What was the embassy estimate of this? What were we reporting?

TRUEHEART: We were saying that there was no showing of this. For example, it was pretty obvious that the federal government was not going to directly supply the Biafra area while the war was going on. When it was over, of course, they were ready to have us do anything we wanted to supply them, bringing in food and whatnot, except that these people who had been pressing for support to Biafra, once the war was over, said, "We should now bring aircraft carriers off here and drop food supplies by air into Biafra." We in the embassy took the position, "This is ridiculous. We can ship the stuff in trucks much better, and the other is simply an affront to the government. They would never agree to it." But that is the kind of thing that they were doing.

Q: They were trying to do this for political reasons.

TRUEHEART: For domestic political reasons or whatever. There were a lot of technical analyses which were based on rather skimpy information, showing how many people were undernourished and on the point of death, and we had various visits and talks with people who were nutritionists, who were predicting all sorts of disastrous things. Certainly it would have been very typical of the end of a civil war to have draconian measures taken against the defeated. I certainly never thought this, in large part because of my acquaintance with General Gowon, who was a Christian gentleman who had Sandburg's Lincoln on his bedside table, as he told me, who, in fact, once the war was over, followed just such a policy. It was the most beneficent victor's policy ever seen in any country, including especially the United States after the Civil War. The Biafrans and Ibos were brought back into every area, including the Army. General Gowon's pilots of his personal airplane were Ibos. In fact, nothing like this happened.

As one final example, in bringing in the supplies at the end of the war, we wanted to get them in as quickly as possible, and the quickest way to bring them in was an airlift. I don't mean to drop them, but an airlift into Lagos with trucks and so on. This was best done by the Air Force with these--not the C-5s, but the next biggest one.

Q: C-130s or something.

TRUEHEART: It's a big jet-type plane, C-141 (?). I went to the Nigerians about bringing the food and trucks and whatnot in this way, and they agreed, provided the U.S. Air Force insignia were removed from the planes. I said, "Supposing that can be done, obviously these are American planes. No other air force has this kind of plane. So it will be well known that they're American planes." The answer was, "Yes, that's fine. We'd like it to be understood that they're your planes and that we had the name removed." And that's the way it was done.

You asked me about staff there. The head of our aid mission, which was, at the time, the biggest one in the world next to India, Mike Adler was really the finest aid mission director I've ever had. So I had nothing but, I think, the finest support during my time there. On the other hand, I have never in my own experience, seen a case, even including Vietnam--when there were deep divisions during the period of 1963--when things were so at sixes and sevens in Washington as they were over this matter.

Q: I assume, then, there was really not strong direction from the top, as far as Nixon, Kissinger, and Rogers. Their interest was elsewhere?

TRUEHEART: I'm sure it was. It couldn't have been a very big item on their agendas. Yet Rogers visited when I was there. He had gone to a chiefs-of-mission meeting.

This is an interesting twist. I came back on consultation, and I think it was expected by all concerned that I was going to be told where to get off by Kissinger and everybody in the NSC staff. I got back, and the meetings never came off.

Finally, I was about to go back, and I did have an appointment with Kissinger before going back. I went over to see him. It turned out that this was the weekend of the incursion into Cambodia, and three people on Kissinger's staff, one of whom was Roger Morris, the villain in the piece, as far as I was concerned, I'm sure he was one of the people who resigned over this Cambodian matter. Tony Lake was another, and I forget who the third one was. Tony Lake, of course, I'd known very well, because he'd worked for me in Vietnam. In any case, I went over to see Kissinger. This was about the time of the question of how we were going to supply the Biafrans after the war was over. I saw him. It was a very cut-and-dried sort of a meeting. He didn't have anything much to say. He asked me about the situation, and I told him that I thought that the supplying of the defeated forces and their people was coming along all right, and it was much better to haul the goods in to them by truck, than to try and drop it by air, and the other proposal didn't make any sense. He just sort of nodded. His mind was elsewhere, too.

Of course, talking about priorities, I read his book covering this period, and to me, this whole matter was so central to the period, he alluded to it both sides of one page in this 600-page book or whatever, and allowed as how that in this matter he thought the State Department was probably right. (Laughs) And that was about all he said about it.

Q: It does point out that Washington is basically good for one crises at a time. When you have something like Vietnam, there's little room for other things. In a way, it shows what a very strong actor at basically a subordinate level can do if he or she wants to show a lot of initiative, which we're seeing right now with the Oliver North that's going on concerning Central America, showing that a dedicated single-issue person can often dominate the process, particularly if this does not happen to be on center stage.

TRUEHEART: Yes. If, for example, I had known more about where I was going, known the people, or whatever, could I have had more of an influence? I don't know. I didn't, in fact, and did not feel knowledgeable enough, at the beginning, at least, to do anything but try to find my way into this new maze. When I went to Saigon, it was the same thing. I'm bound to say that by the time I left there, I thought I had a pretty firm view about things. In both cases, I was tabula rasa at the beginning of my tour.

Q: After the war was over, did relations begin to improve with the central Nigerian government? Or were they basically rather cool as long as you were there?

TRUEHEART: They didn't improve significantly. Once the great matter of food for the Biafrans was taken care of, there weren't any really crucial issues. Meanwhile, the oil production began to grow rapidly, and I found myself, just before leaving, telling the Minister of Development, whatever he was, Economics, that I thought since they would very shortly have no problems with foreign exchange, it was doubtful in my mind that we could continue any major aid program. Of course, he was taken aback by this. Of course, that's what happened. Apart from the war and the matter of the relief operations, after this was resolved, there were no special problems that I can recall offhand, but there was no great warmth, either, in relations.

Q: Was the United States out of line from most of the other major powers who were represented there? I'm thinking of Britain, France, and you mentioned the Soviet Union.

TRUEHEART: The French was an interesting case, because the France of De Gaulle, of course, was even more openly in support of the Biafrans, and so were the Scandinavians. Of course, the South Africans were supporting the Biafrans. My own belief on this is what you had here was, again, a mixed-up sort of thing. I think the French were concerned about an English-speaking former English colony becoming a major power in West Africa, and were glad enough to see it broken up, and were, therefore, prepared to support Biafra. They never broke relations, however, with the federal government, but they had spoken openly of their support for Biafra. I think, of course, the South Africans had the same motives, to break up this big--this is a country right after Brazil in terms of population in the world.

I think the government itself interpreted our position as having a big admixture of racism in it. I think they were probably encouraged in this view by the ambassador here. One of my visitors during my time there was Carl Rowan for three or four days, and he stayed

with me and got to see a lot more of the government than I was seeing at the time. This is very much his analysis of the situation.

Q: When you left, you had an assignment as Vice Commandant?

TRUEHEART: Down there they called it Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Commander of the Air University, something like that.

Q: Was this an unusual assignment?

TRUEHEART: No, we had had people in that post for many years. I succeeded Tap Bennett there. The duties were nominal, I would say. One lived on the post, had a nice, big house, the only civilian living on this military post, had an office and a secretary provided by the Air Force. I even got regular highly classified briefings such as I had long since become accustomed to because of my past. I went to the staff meetings of the commander. I could make suggestions and recommendations about the curriculum, help them with getting speakers. It was very much like any other war college. They were constantly having visiting lecturers on every sort. I was available to talk with any students who wanted assistance on their thesis. I gave one or two lectures myself, but I'm not good at that sort of thing, and didn't do much of that.

Q: While you were there, did you find that there is a different mind set of, say, the Air Force officer to the Foreign Service officer about how one should proceed in the world?

TRUEHEART: I don't know. I think it would probably be very hard to generalize about, because I think there was every kind of mind set. I must say, the people I knew best were officers who were on the faculty, rather than the students. I didn't find that they were any more hawkish than any other group of people of that age and knowledge and so on. They were very different types of people. The fighter pilot is one type of guy, and there are a lot of people who aren't fighter pilots and who are not wedded to machines. It was a congenial place for me, a sort of dove, to be. I was quite comfortable.

Then I came back and worked for a little more than a year with Chris Herter in the environment area, and was involved most notably with the Save the Whales operations. I went to Japan once with the head of the Council on Environmental Policy, or whatever it was called. I did a variety of things that we were doing in terms of particularly preserving endangered species, that sort of thing.

Q: At lunchtime, you and I were talking about some of your reflections on intelligence activities and operations. After you retired, you served with Senator Frank Church's committee, which was taking a hard look at intelligence operations.

TRUEHEART: I was an advisor, or consultant, to that committee for pretty much all the time it was in existence. The committee staff was divided up into people who were looking into the CIA operations, and that was the section I was working with. The head of

that section was David Aaron, who later became deputy to Brzezinski on the NSC staff, who has written a couple of novels lately. Then there was other sections on the FBI, on military intelligence, and on NSA.

Not so much in that particular experience, but I had had more than normal experience with intelligence, particularly in my job as the DDC, as you called it, but also in the Army and in my AEC work, and in my earlier assignment with INR and so on. In fact, I had dealt closely with the CIA in Vietnam and in Nigeria. So I feel I know a good deal about their operations. I just wanted to say that I concluded, after a lot of thought, that covert action (as opposed to intelligence collection) is rarely in the interests of this country, and I think it's very hard to think of a true success in this field. If you have time to look back on it, I think the typical example of Iran is rather obviously . . .

Q: Known as the Iran "Contragate", or whatever.

TRUEHEART: That, it seems to me, is an example of how these things don't really work. There is a tremendous temptation on the part of any new administration, and I personally saw several come to power, to feel that you can do these things on the cheap, that you can change conditions in a foreign country, but with mirrors. And you can't. If you have a problem abroad and you go to the State Department or the military and talk about it, if you're getting good advice, you'll find that it's always a difficult question you're dealing with. It's very rare that we can make any gross changes in a foreign country. But there may well be times when covert action, or secret action, of this kind is called for. If so, I think we should be prepared to conjure it up ad hoc.

If you have an organization whose mission in life it is to be ready to carry out covert action virtually anywhere in the world, the temptation is too great to use it because it's there. I think that's what's happened in so many cases. In the nature of the case, you've got very talented people who are sitting there ready to carry out such missions. I think nothing we have done in my lifetime has done more to discredit this country in the eyes of other countries than these covert actions. So I think that it's been a disastrous failure from the beginning, and I think we ought to abolish this part of the Central Intelligence Agency's mission.

Q: One of the ambassadors I interviewed early on, Robert Woodward, was saying that we had squandered our greatest asset, which was our moral superiority; perhaps that's the wrong term. But the point was that we did represent working from a moral height. People trusted us. And now that's gone, really for no significant gain whatsoever.

TRUEHEART: That's precisely my point. I'd carry it one point further. We've lost the confidence of our own people by the same actions.

Q: As we close this interview, there are two questions I ask. Looking back on your career, Mr. Ambassador, what gave you the greatest satisfaction?

TRUEHEART: That's a difficult one. I wouldn't single out any particular achievement or event. With the single exception of my assignment to the Baghdad Pact, which was rather brief, I found a good deal of satisfaction in all my assignments. I didn't feel I always was able to accomplish everything one might, but I thought I was very fortunate in getting assignments in interesting places, and for the most part, places where the main action was or turned out to be. I wouldn't really want to single one out. Looking back, it all seems like a very lucky period for me, and I enjoyed it. I hope that it was useful.

Q: Following through with this, you had a career which both was distinguished and one which you've just said you enjoyed. A young person comes to you today and says, "Mr. Ambassador, should I join the Foreign Service or not?" How would you reply?

TRUEHEART: I would have to be very tempered in my encouragement. I certainly have not tried to encourage either of my own sons to go into it. I think the opportunities are not what they used to be, or so it seems to me. But my first answer is always, "Take the examination. If you pass, then you can think about whether you want to join or not." (Laughs) Because it is almost a lottery, whether you get in. On the other hand, I see a great many young people who are, in fact, thinking about going into the Foreign Service through our program at DACOR [Diplomatic and Consular Officers Retired], giving fellowships.

Q: This is a retired Foreign Service organization.

TRUEHEART: Yes. Our foundation gives about ten fellowships a year to young people getting into foreign relations, not necessarily going to the Foreign Service. I'm bound to say that I'm overwhelmed by the talents and qualifications of these young people. I certainly don't say anything to them to discourage them from going into it. The only thing that troubles me is that I see this wealth of talent going into the Department and the Foreign Service, and then looking at it from where I sit, looking at the papers, it seems to me that their talents are not being used as much as they used to be. They have never been used to the full, but I'm very disturbed at the way in which the career is just not being given the treatment it should have. I've had a number of good friends myself who left the Foreign Service and advanced their own positions greatly by going on the Hill or going into business or something else.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you very much.

End of interview