

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

AMBASSADOR HENRY L. T. KOREN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	
Raised in Princeton	
US Army: WWII	
CIA	
Entered Foreign Service	1948
Port-au-Prince, Haiti	1948-1951
Administrative officer	
Bern, Switzerland	1951-1953
Political reporting officer	
Intelligence operations	
Personnel security problems	
Military Furlough	1953-1958
Allied staff in Berlin	
Executive assistant in the White House	
Manila, Philippines	1958-1960
Ambassador Charles (Chip) Bohlen (out to pasture)	
Political counselor	
Comments on Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos	
Department of State	1961-1964
Northeast Asian Affairs	
Director of South Asian Affairs	
Working with Averell Harriman	
Laos and the Domino theory	
Capture and death of Diem brothers	
Brazzaville, Congo	1964-1966
Selection process	

Congo turns from pre-West to communist oriented	
French responsibility for change	
Few US interests in Congo	
Department of State	1966
Brief stint in Intelligence and Research	
Saigon, Vietnam	1966-1968
Deputy to the Deputy Ambassador	
Counterinsurgency movement (later CORDS)	
Confusion in I Corps	
Displeasure of Rusk and McNamara	
“Kicked up” to I Cords	
Deputy to Cmdr. For Civil Operations Revolutionary Development	
Ambassador Cabot Lodge	
Deputy Ambassador William Porter	
General Westmoreland	
ARVN lacked dedication and motivation	
Personnel problems with Washington	
Mai Lai Massacre	
The Phoenix program	
Operation of Marine Corps pacification teams	
Philippine and Thai contingents largely symbolic	
Ted Kennedy a nuisance	
Da Nang and Hue	
Department of State	1968-1971
Inspection corps	
Retired	1971

INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Koren.]

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

KOREN: I guess from childhood on up.

Q: Where were you born?

KOREN: I was born in Princeton, New Jersey. My father was a professor. We were interested in foreign relations from the very beginning.

Q: What did your father teach?

KOREN: Modern languages.

Q: So you were already in the culture right from the beginning?

KOREN: I remember in World War I when we got the morning paper, the New York Times, and the family would say, "What did the English do? What did the Americans do? What did the French do?" and so forth. It came down to my turn--I was the youngest--and I said, "What happened to the Germans?" I suppose from that moment on my interest was sparked.

Q: I have to say that one of the positive sides of a war--there aren't many positive sides--it certainly can bring out an interest in foreign affairs in many people. I know I had the same thing with World War II.

You were born in 1911, and you were in the military for quite some time, weren't you?

KOREN: I was in the military from the time I got an ROTC commission in 1933, and then I was on active duty from 1940 to '46.

Q: What type of work were you doing, sir?

KOREN: I commanded first a company and then a battalion in the Airborne.

Q: Did any of this spark continue to keep your interest in foreign affairs outside of the military?

KOREN: When we were in France, I tried to speak French. [Laughter] I found that that was one of the things they didn't teach us, how to speak. I could write and read and everything else, but speaking was not very easy to come by, so to speak. The same thing happened in German. I had taken a lot of German, but I have absolutely no fluency in German. When I took the Foreign Service oral exam, the then--what do they call them--director of the . . .

Q: Board of Examiners?

KOREN: Board of Examiners. What was his name? He's very well known.

Q: I think we're both thinking of the same man, because I think he was doing that for years. But anyway.

KOREN: It's ridiculous I can't think of it. He said, "Will you please open the little book to page 17?" And I looked at page 17 and it was Greek. And so trying to be humorous, I said, "Well, that's all Greek to me, sir," and he didn't think that was very funny at all. [Laughter] Joe Green, that's who it was, Joseph C. Green. That started me off sort of on the wrong foot.

Then another thing that happened was the day I took the oral exam was the day that Gandhi had been murdered, and somebody asked me, "Who did it?"

I said, "I didn't know, but I was sure that if a Moslem did it, it would be very serious."

And he said, "Well, suppose it was Hindus that did it?"

And I said, "Well, that would be serious enough but not quite as bad."

He said, "You seem to know something about the sects of religion in India."

And I said, "No, I really don't know anything," but he led me down the garden path and the first thing I knew I was over my head, way over my head.

So I came back that evening and said to my wife, "If you had any idea of going into the Foreign Service, forget about it." [Chuckles] I thought I'd go flatly on my can. I was surprised when they told me I had passed. I was then working for the Central Intelligence, CIA.

Q: This is in 1948?

KOREN: '48, yes. They couldn't understand why I would be interested in other than the Foreign Service. My brother was also in the Foreign Service, and he had passed the exams. As a matter of fact, he should have been in the Foreign Service from the word "go," but in those days when he graduated from college, the idea was that you had to have a little money to be in the Foreign Service. The Rogers Act changed all that, fortunately, but it was too late for him to go in. So he went in under the Manpower Act and I went in under the Manpower Act, also. But he had already been accepted to the Foreign Service. It must have been the spring of '48, or maybe even earlier. I don't remember.

Q: You came in at about what rank?

KOREN: Class 4.

Q: The old Class 4. They keep changing it, but Class 1 used to be the top rank and there's career ambassador. Coming in as a mid-level officer, did you get much training before you went out?

KOREN: We had the Foreign Service school. I can't remember. That lasted the whole winter of '47, '48, and we were sworn in I think it must have been June of '48, and we were commissioned by Secretary Marshall at that time. I remember very distinctly going up to Secretary Marshall, because he had a reputation of remembering and I'd only met him a couple of times before.

Q: This was when you were in the military?

KOREN: In the military, and the last time was just before I went overseas he had the practice of visiting every division before it went overseas and picking out one to inspect very thoroughly, and it just happened that he picked my unit, my battalion. The thing that I thought very interesting was when I went through the line to receive my Foreign Service diploma, he said, "I've seen you someplace before."

And I said, "Yes, sir," and I told him.

He said, "I thought so." So that was the end of it but, of course, this gave General Marshall a very high pinnacle in my book. [Laughter]

Q: Your first posting was to Port-au-Prince. What was the situation in Haiti when you were there? This is 1948.

KOREN: Well, it was still the vestige of occupation.

Q: Our occupation?

KOREN: Our occupation. We were very fortunate in that respect that the U.S. stood pretty high, and the marine occupation had been a benevolent occupation, as you know. They were still very highly regarded. As a matter of fact, most of what is now known as infrastructure was due to the marine occupation. They had built the roads and so forth and so on.

Many of the Haitian businesses had prospered under the marine occupation. For instance, car dealers did very well and others did well. It was really at that time only one product that was even slightly important in the world scene, and that was the sugar and sisal. There wasn't native Haitian sugar people, but mostly it was run by the United States, by Americans, and they obviously were prosperous.

Q: Were you doing economic reporting mostly?

KOREN: At the beginning I was assigned as the administrative officer, and it was sort of a first drawback as far as the Foreign Service was concerned, and I was concerned that the previous man who had been the so-called administrative officer had been drummed out of the Service because he was a homosexual and everybody knew it, so that didn't give me a very good taste. Our ambassador was Jacques Decoursey. I don't know whether you ever knew him, but he had been the chief inspector and he friends, of course, who were inspectors. Our first inspection which I think occurred in the first year I was there, and the inspector asked me where I'd like to be posted in the next year or two. And I said, "Anywhere but Latin America," and he turned out to be a Latin American inspector, so that was another step backwards. [Laughter] So my initiation was anything but pleasant.

Q: Well, your next posting was to Bern, which is not one of our most active posts, or at least I wouldn't think it would be. You were there from 1951 to 1953. What type of work were you doing there?

KOREN: Well, I was in the peculiar assignment that they invented called reporter. It was a semi-intelligence operation. I can't remember. Special reporter is what it amounted to and beside the political section.

Q: Wouldn't this normally be the type of thing the CIA would do?

KOREN: Well, yes, but this is a brainchild of somebody in the Foreign Service who thought that there was some special activities that the Foreign Service officers could do and at least be complementary and supplementary to the actual intelligence operation.

Q: And, of course, I guess this is the time when the CIA was just being put together anyway, so it wasn't that strong an apparatus.

KOREN: It was a hell of a lot more together than naught, but when I was in the CIA, it became CIA. It used to be known as the CIG, Central Intelligence Group. CIA was formed and there was going unit of the CIA in Bern.

Q: Was Switzerland at that point as much of an intelligence area between East and West as one is led to believe from all the spy novels?

KOREN: Right. I believe that was the reason we were sent there, that I was sent there at any rate.

Q: You can add these things on. Again, this is obviously an unclassified interview, but we are talking about something of almost 40 years ago. Looking back on it, did we get much good information there or was it mostly defensive?

KOREN: I would say that generally it was well covered and better covered by the CIA, and I was in great respects simply a fifth wheel spinning around more or less by myself. Whatever I got that what I thought was worth anything I would pass it by the CIA station chief and his people. The only thing I was able to get through the diplomatic channels was because of the consul in Basel, who was of Norwegian descent, and he had very good contacts. He was a great help to me, introducing me to people, and through them I got a copy of the communist manifesto, the first time we got our fingers on it. That was, as I say, through diplomatic means.

Q: You knew somebody who knew somebody who got it?

KOREN: And he knew somebody who produced it. That was very helpful, and I'm sure it went back to Washington by the CIA and not us, because we had a back channel but it was very, very . . .

Q: The Korean War came in June of 1950 and you were in Europe at the time. There really was a major shift toward realizing that we were in a period of confrontation, which is maybe basically still going on today in 1989. Did you in Switzerland see the machinery beginning to move into this new pasture?

KOREN: Well, I felt that, but mostly I would be, pursued by this what you would call this homosexual aspect, because, as I told you, the previous administrative officer had been kicked out because he was a homosexual, and lo and behold, there was a nest of homosexuals in the CIA in Switzerland.

Q: I might add, because times and mores have changed some, that homosexuals were considered to be at great risk from a security point of view, and with justification in that the Soviets would often use this as a threat of exposure unless you did things for them. So there you were.

KOREN: So there I was, in the one place that you would least expect it.

Q: Particularly in the CIA.

KOREN: The CIA and the section chief himself. So that sort of soured my outlook on the Foreign Service.

Q: The State Department had, of course, a reputation, the whole overseas establishment, of being what in modern parity would be an excessive number of gays.

You had a military furlough between 1953 and 1958. What was this exactly and what caused this?

KOREN: That was of my doing because of my feeling of outright disgust at this aspect of the Foreign Service, considering the CIA.

Q: And also you were assigned to relatively non-challenging posts at the time, too. It wasn't sort of the fun posts.

KOREN: Very pleasant posts, yes.

Q: Pleasant, but not--

KOREN: But the real work of the Foreign Service was in the economic field as far as Switzerland was concerned. Well, that added some problems within the embassy itself. At that time the ambassador was a fellow who was a non-career.

Q: He was a minister. And this was Richard C. Patterson?

KOREN: Yes, Dickie.

Q: And what was he like? Was he just a social butterfly?

KOREN: He was a grasping, pretentious man who had no morals at all, absolutely none. That was another thing that . . .

Q: You really came in--of course and also coming in at the mid-level one is less tolerant. When one is young and first in, you say, "Well, this will pass."

KOREN: You've got your career ahead of you.

Q: Yes. But when you come in at the middle--you were very unfortunate, really.

KOREN: Well, unfortunate, except from the point of view of the atmosphere around was very bad. I mean, I don't want to run down any individual, but this man Patterson had no morals at all. He was absolutely inscrutable. We would have to go there once in a while to dinner, and it was very embarrassing for me and disgusting for my wife. He had these floozies that he was playing around with all the time. So what it amounted to was I was ready to quit or something, and I talked to friends who had some influence in the military, and I was offered a job in the Army, an active duty commission again in the Army and so I grabbed it.

Q: What type of work were you doing in the Army?

KOREN: That was the best job that anybody could ask for. That was in Berlin and I was the staff assistant, I guess they call it, to the commander of Berlin. Then I was made the chief of staff of the Allied staff, which meant working for the three allies commandants, and that was a tremendous, interesting, and exciting job.

Q: And it was an exciting period, too, of course, when tensions were at really their height. You were a colonel by this time?

KOREN: Yes, I was a colonel. I was promoted in '45 to a full colonel and so that when they assigned me to active duty, I reassumed the same rank. That lasted until '58.

Q: What brought you back into the Foreign Service?

KOREN: Well, I was assigned to the White House. I was executive assistant in the White House.

Q: You were in the military at that time?

KOREN: I was still in the military. I could see that I was going between two schools that were spreading apart, so I had to make a choice and I decided for various reasons the Foreign Service was where I should be.

Q: Did you have some trepidation before going back in, having had the bad experience?

KOREN: Oh, yes. The bad experience, and also the fact that I was considered sort of a piranha and somebody who was untrustworthy. [Chuckles]

Q: Well, this is the thing. You'd been in posts which had had bad problems and then you had left, which, for the military, is like deserting in Foreign Service terms. [Laughter]

KOREN: They thought I had deserted.

Q: Oh, yes.

KOREN: As a matter of interest, they took me out of the Foreign Service register, I mean the State Department register. Isn't that what we call it?

Q: Yes. The biographic list.

KOREN: The biographic register, yes. They just edited me out. [Laughter]

Q: That's the Foreign Service equivalent of ripping your buttons off and sending you out in the cold. Well, did you have any trouble getting back in? Did you have to pass any board?

KOREN: Yes, I had very definite troubles, because the--I won't mention names--but the head of the Foreign Service personnel had that feeling of, "Well, he's a deserter and screw him." And a friend of mine, a man I greatly admired, asked for me by name, and they said, "Impossible." They even wanted to stop my promotion from Class 3 to Class 2. It was Chip Bohlen, and he was not in the highest favor of the hierarchy of the State Department.

Q: This was during the McCarthy period, and he was the preeminent Foreign Service officer. But he had been interpreter at Yalta and all this, and so there's an attempt to make him the fall guy.

KOREN: Yes. But he persisted and when I left the White House, President Eisenhower wrote me a very nice letter thanking me for my services and so forth, and I happened to receive that the day I went over to see what had happened to my assignment that Bohlen had requested. As I say, I had it in my hand at that time. I just received it, so I walked over to where it was in the old days.

Q: Walter Johnson Building, I think.

KOREN: Yes, Walter Johnson Building. And I pulled my letter out and said, "Maybe that'll help a little." Well, of course it did. I was not only promoted, but I was given the job.

Q: Before we move on, when you were in the White House working on the equivalent of was it the NSC or the equivalent to the NSC?

KOREN: No, it was a special assignment that General Eisenhower had requested. He wanted a study of our worldwide bases, and he had tapped a man named Frank Nash, who had been the special assistant to Mr. Forrestal in Defense and then became the first ISA in Defense. And he was tapped for the job and he tapped me as his assistant.

Q: Well, tell me on this subject, because I've seen it in my service abroad, one of the problems we had in recent years and for some time has been these bases. While they have a military value, there is usually a very high political price on them. I'm thinking in Greece and France, other places. Troops don't really of any country get along very well. I mean, there are problems. Were we trying to balance off political and military considerations? Or were we saying, "All right. There may be a war with the Soviet Union and we needed bases here, here, and here, and the political costs will have to be taken care of at some later date"? What was our attitude?

KOREN: Ours was sort of a general survey of the amalgam of both sides, and the idea was, I think, Mr. Eisenhower really started off with the point of view of we have too many commitments abroad and we should try to narrow them down.

Q: So it was in this light, that point of view?

KOREN: From that point of view, what was essential and was not essential. And my report is still gathering dust in various echelons of the government, and it was a fairly thick report, about that thick.

Q: You're motioning about an inch.

KOREN: It was worldwide, and one of the benefits from my point of view was that we traveled everywhere, we went to all the bases, and so it was an education. And we had support, of course, from the military, but more and more interestingly, we had--oh, I can't remember--about four or five Foreign Service officers who were our resources in that respect. Marshall Green, for example, was one and Mack Godley was another. Do you remember him?

Q: Oh, yes. You certainly had high caliber.

KOREN: Well, you know I found out that when you're in the White House, you just say, "I want so and so," and they have the habit of coming. We just had a wonderful group.

Q: Well, moving on. You were appointed political counselor to our embassy in Manila. You served from 1958 to 1960 under Ambassador Charles Bohlen, Chip Bohlen. In the first place, Ambassador Bohlen was a real authority on the Soviet Union. How did he end up in the Philippines?

KOREN: Because of the differences with Foster Dulles.

Q: What was the problem?

KOREN: Well, Foster Dulles was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican and conservative and Chip was a Democrat and a liberal, and they just did not get along together.

Q: And this is really to put him out to pasture in a way?

KOREN: Yes, put him to pasture. They had to give him a job, and it was a tough job.

Q: Well, what were our interests and our situation in the Philippines? We're talking about 1958 when you first arrived.

KOREN: Well, we had, of course, primarily an issue on the bases.

Q: This is the one at Subic Bay?

KOREN: Well, we had three bases. We had Subic Bay and we had Clark Field and we had Langley Point.

Q: Actually, the name escapes me, too.

KOREN: That was a key problem we had in the Philippines. Then, of course, we had ongoing problems of veterans and immigration and economic problems. The Philippines political problems were constantly turning around, and the basis for it all was what we just called it G&C--graft and corruption.

Q: How did we deal with the problem of corruption and graft? We always take a high and mighty attitude about this, but in many countries this is what makes things run. Were we hurting ourselves, or were we going along? How did we operate in the Philippines in those days?

KOREN: We hurt ourselves. I mean, we felt it but naturally we went along with a certain amount of it, and there was very little of the sudden jerking of the rein and saying, "Enough is enough." That was primarily the ambassador's job. In effect, he would go to see the president or somebody--

Q: Who was the president at that time?

KOREN: Well, Garcia was the actual president at that time. It was just after the Philippines' Magsaysay had been killed.

Q: Killed in an airplane crash.

KOREN: It became García, and he was a go-along politician.

Q: Magsaysay had been painted in heroic terms, but on the ground as a political counselor in 1958 and three years thereafter, what was your impression of Magsaysay's impact and his accomplishments?

KOREN: I'd say he accomplished a great deal. I never knew him because he had been killed by the time I got there, but I knew Diem very well, although he had left at the time. I knew him in Vietnam. But I'd say Magsaysay had a exorbitantly high reputation, and how he would have handled the problems that developed, I don't know.

Q: Well, the problems as you were describing were not of the Huk insurgency--had pretty well died down by this time. Is that right?

KOREN: Well, yes. They had died down.

Q: But the problems were really one of having a viable economy with the problems of the ruling class and their corruption and the graft?

KOREN: Yes, I think that's probably right. Underlying everything was the problem of the "haves" and the "have nots." That's endemic for every underdeveloped country, as you well know.

Q: What could we do about the situation? I mean, it had been our colony, but were we still acting as a colonial power or was it really "hands off," saying "This is your problem"?

KOREN: No. I'd say primarily our attitude was and had to be a friendly counselor, and we had certain principles and certain institutions which we respected. We tried to guide them according to our principles in that respect.

Q: How did we do this? You're the political counselor.

KOREN: Talking to the people.

Q: You talked to the people, but, one, you talk to the people and somebody's getting paid. If you're talking to the people receiving graft, it takes an awful lot more than talking to get somebody to stop taking money.

KOREN: Well, from my point of view, we had no authority in the sense of "you must not do that" parental type of authority. We could only say, "That's very difficult and it will give you trouble in the long run." Sometimes it would take and sometimes it wouldn't, but basically it was mostly, I would say, a friendly persuasion. [Chuckles]

Q: How did you see the political situation there? Was it a healthy political situation?

KOREN: No. Very chaotic and changeable. To give you an example, the two people that I considered my best friends in the Philippines were Ferdinand Marcos and Benigno Aquino, and they couldn't have been more opposite, as you well know. The thing that went on that I did not know that I've found out since then there was some underground things that the CIA was perfectly--not perfectly, but fairly--cognizant that I knew nothing about.

Q: Here you were. You had been within the CIA orbit at one time. One of the complaints has often been that the CIA operates and gets things which it does not share to those whom it should. What I gather is that you didn't feel it was a very good cooperation in that.

KOREN: Well, I felt I had all the cooperation that I needed from the CIA. In fact, I had more than I needed in some respects that they were looking to me for introductions to various people. And one of the last nights I spent was with the CIA station chief at that time and the Marcos, Imelda and Freddie Marcos, because the CIA station chief knew I knew him and asked me if I would give him a leg up.

Q: What position did Marcos have at the time you knew of him, and how did you evaluate him then?

KOREN: I evaluated him as a very ambitious individual who had considerable talent, talent in the political sense, and he knew that as far as running the Philippines and being president of the Philippines, which he is, was his objective.

Q: What was he at that time?

KOREN: When I first knew him he was a congressman.

Q: You were saying Ferdinand Marcos was a congressman.

KOREN: Marcos was a congressman and then he became a senator. And the thing that is interesting to me was that in the Philippines at that time you had elections, everybody voted for whomever they wanted.

Q: Anywhere?

KOREN: Anywhere. And the person who came out on top was marked from then on as the number one. They used to say, "Number one, number one."

Q: You're pointing the forefinger up in the air.

KOREN: That's to indicate number one. And he was number one in the congressional race, he was number one in the senatorial race. So he was doubly marked, I would say.

Q: What made him so popular?

KOREN: Well, he was a very good politician. He was fast with his tongue and made a great deal of promises, and never underestimate the power of a woman. He would go out to the housings, you know the Philippine housing, the barrios, are not noted for their intelligence, and he knew just the right touch. He'd grown up that way, and his wife, Imelda, was a perfect counterpart. She would sing and he would talk for 20 minutes on without a note and then she would sing, and it was the most popular combination that you could imagine.

Q: Well, we did we see this as a couple at that time, saying, "Maybe they have the right touch to bring the Philippines together"?

KOREN: They were the best possible bet for cohesiveness on the part of the Philippines and the part of the Philippine people. In other words, they used to say Marcos was tremendously popular, which he was, and this couple was tremendously popular. I'll hark back to that dinner I had for Marcos and the station chief. At that time he outlined a modern, two-way, very authoritarian government. In other words, there had to be one person on the top who called all the shots, and he was the man who was going to do it. Well, Diem tried to do it in Vietnam, for example. So he looked like the best bet.

Q: You said your other best friend was Benigno Aquino, who was the slain husband of the president of the Philippines. How did Benigno Aquino seem to you at that point?

KOREN: Benigno, we used to call him the "Boy Wonder of Tarlac," because he was very young. At 35 years, he was the governor of a province, and he was much, much more intellectually endowed than Marcos. Marcos had smarts; he was sort of a street politician. But Benigno thought in terms of issues and he was a very articulate man and a very intelligent man, and I think he would have been a great president of the Philippines if he had lived.

Q: Talking about our people at the embassy, what was Charles Bohlen's operating style in the embassy? How did he work?

KOREN: He would give you an assignment, and you would be expected to fulfill that. If you had any questions, you would come back and say, "I can't do it," or "I need help," and he would give you whatever help he thought was appropriate. To me, he was a great individual, but he had also very strict principles. He was a very intelligent and wise--you know, "The Wise Men."

Q: There's a book called The Wise Men, in which he was one included about American foreign policy after World War II.

KOREN: Yes. That was an extraordinarily good book, if you haven't read it.

Q: I have read it, yes.

KOREN: At any rate, Chip would, as I say, give you an assignment within your field, he would expect you to do something. He had very high standards, but he was also a very kind and worldly man. He exemplified his background and his training and was unquestionably the best ambassador I ever worked for.

Q: How did you find the staff at the embassy? I mean, you had a bad experience, both in Bern and Switzerland, and now you're back in the Foreign Service. How well do you feel you were served by the staff?

KOREN: I had a very good section.

Q: This is the political section.

KOREN: Political section. The DCM was a very likable, gentle person, who also had high standards just like Bohlen and, of course, he was more approachable. Bohlen was still the ambassador and as far as I was concerned, he was always approachable, but the DCM was more of a friend, a colleague type of person. As I say, he was a gentle and sympathetic type of person. I had a little problem there that the man who I replaced didn't like the idea and he was still there for a while, but that worked itself out.

Q: Often in the Foreign Service you don't really overlap with the person you replace, which has its strong points and its weak points. The weak point is that you don't pass on knowledge. The strong point is sometimes there is not the greatest cooperation between the two. There's a resentment.

KOREN: There was a considerable amount of professional jealousy.

Q: Well, yes. Of course, you had been out and also Bohlen had specifically asked for you, too.

KOREN: Yes. It was a very, very pleasant time.

Q: It was a pleasant time, but also it sounds like a very challenging time.

KOREN: It was.

Q: How did you feel the cooperation from the State Department, from the bureau and all. It wasn't Henry Robertson, or was it at that time?

KOREN: Walter Robertson. We got from the staff of the Department, I think, all of the cooperation we needed to get.

Q: Did you have any feeling that because of Dulles' animosity toward Bohlen that sometimes this carries over into the whole Departmental feeling toward the whole post?

KOREN: No. I think mostly that the Department attitude--of course, I was not in the Department at that time--they, I think, pretty generally felt that Bohlen would do a good job no matter where he was, and yet this is sort of a strange place for him to be.

Q: Yes. Well then he moved from there. Kennedy appointed him to Paris.

KOREN: The first thing that happened was Christian Herter--

Q: Who took over from Dulles.

KOREN: I can remember Chip's relief, because Herter was a Harvard man and a friend of his. But from the point of view of the working of the embassy, of course, anything would work well under Bohlen and Mrs. Bohlen, and we had the best time in the world.

Q: Then in 1961 you came back, and after a short time in Northeast Asian Affairs, you became the director of South Asian Affairs.

KOREN: Southeast.

Q: Now, this was quite an assignment, wasn't it? Because we're talking the time when all hell was breaking loose there, 1961.

KOREN: Yes. That was the time, you're quite right, of North East Asian Affairs, and I didn't know my ass from third base on Japan and the Ryukyus.

Q: And Korea.

KOREN: And Korea. Japan, Korea and the Ryukyus, and I had to learn everything that I could learn in a short time. I felt uncomfortable after a few months or so, and all of a sudden Averell Harriman called me and said, "We're assigning you to Southeast Asian Affairs," and I thought, "Oh, my God."

Q: Why was that?

KOREN: He just wanted a man that he felt he could trust in Southeast Asian Affairs.

Q: Now, Harriman had this rather unusual appointment as assistant secretary for Asian Affairs when he was a man who was certainly eligible to have been--well, he aspired to be President, with a good reason, but also to be Secretary of State, and yet he accepted this position in Asian Affairs and it was not a sinecure at all. How would you describe Harriman as an operator, working under Harriman in Asian Affairs?

KOREN: Well, to be quite frank, I was pretty much scared to death most of the time. I didn't know Harriman. I had met him before, but it was purely social. His daughter was a friend of mine. You probably heard that Harriman was considered the crocodile.

Q: Yes.

KOREN: That's exactly the way it was. I used to go in and see him once in a while for various things, and I'd come back and I'd hold my arms up to my cheek and wonder where the blood was coming from.

Q: How did he treat you in these things?

KOREN: Roughly. If you didn't measure up in his opinion and didn't grasp the fundamental question quickly, he would tear you apart. He'd say, "What are you standing up there for that way? Good God, man." You know, he was very rough in language. He didn't mean anything. He was very kindhearted personally, but he was a very tension-making individual to work for. To give you an example, two or three times he'd say, "Are you going to be in tomorrow?"

I'd say, "Sir, tomorrow's Sunday."

And he said, "Oh, yes, that's right. I forget, you're a Christer [sic]."

But the first thing I would do in the morning was to get all the messages that had been piled up overnight and race through those just as fast as I could. I would get there well ahead of what I expected the governor to get there, because he would call up all of a sudden and he would have seen a message and he would jump in the middle of the message and ask you, "What do you think so and so?" Well, if you didn't know just what the hell he was talking about, you'd [stutter], and so that was something I think we all did. I did it because I had to reply to him. All the people who worked for me had to do it because I would ask them, and the old story.

Q: Yes, it moves down.

KOREN: All around the chain of command, it just moves down. It was exhilarating. You couldn't work for Harriman without feeling there was something going on. There was not. Not tension, but excitement in the air, electricity, all the time.

Q: As director of Southeast Asian Affairs, what were your responsibilities? We're talking about the period of 1961 to 1964.

KOREN: Everything except the intricacies of South Vietnam. Now, we had a special--what the hell do they call it?

Q: Special operating group, or something like that.

KOREN: There was a special group that did nothing but at the time counting buddy buddies and all that sort of stuff, and I had, in effect, all the rest of Southeast Asia to worry about.

Q: Which would be Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia?

KOREN: Not Indonesia. That was South Asian Affairs.

Q: How about Burma, Thailand?

KOREN: Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and some part of Vietnam.

Q: How about North Vietnam?

KOREN: No.

Q: That was part of the Vietnam working group. Laos must have been right at the top of your list. This was the time when I can remember President Kennedy getting up and having maps on television and talking about Laos. The idea was to neutralize Laos, wasn't it?

KOREN: That became the objective after a period of time, but, of course, the North Vietnamese took that option away from us. Our great problem with Laos was trying to find somebody that we could rely on.

Q: How did you conceive the threat at that time to the area?

KOREN: Well, I conceived it very much in the same terms of the domino theory.

Q: The domino theory being what?

KOREN: That if one fell all the rest of them would fall one after another.

Q: And this was falling to whom? Would it be to communism, to China, or to . . .

KOREN: To communism, primarily.

Q: Home-grown insurgencies.

KOREN: In some cases it would be Russian communism and in some cases it would be Chinese communism.

Q: What would your job be during the Laotian crisis, when we were looking for some way to put this thing together and we were talking about committing troops. There were all the options. This is for the researcher who doesn't understand how the State Department operates, and so I'd like to have an idea of what type of thing one would do as the director of this office?

KOREN: As I say, our national objective in Laos, for example, was to find a leader on whom we could put some authority and whom we could shore up. We tried several of them, and we finally came, because of Harriman mostly, to Souvanna Phouma. He was

admittedly considered a communist fellow traveler, but he was the man that we had felt could neutralize and make Laos a neutral government. We would instruct the embassy on certain aspects of suggestions. For instance, it was also the time of Prince Sihanouk.

Q: In Cambodia.

KOREN: Yes. And we would suggest to them that such and such a demarche might have some effect on Sihanouk and so forth. In other words, it was primarily from our point of view, what we wanted to do was think up new ideas and if they had not been tried, we would send out messages suggesting them.

Q: Well, did you have a feeling at the time that no matter what we do, we sure as hell aren't going to put troops in there? In your thinking and the people around you, were putting troops into Laos, Cambodia, and all one of the options that you felt was a viable option?

KOREN: No. That was not in our thinking at all at that time. In those days, our job was to keep the governments viable and keep them oriented favorably toward the United States.

Q: Well, did you see Thailand as being a sort of a rock on which you could--

KOREN: Well, Thailand was, comparatively speaking, a very firm bit of soil that we knew where we were when we planted our feet on the soil of Thailand. They had people with whom we were on pretty good terms and who we felt we could trust. For instance, the foreign minister of Thailand. I knew him very well but I can't think of his name right now. That was the monarchy and the monarchy was flourishing with a fireball operation, and so they had something basic to go on. They had a government underneath the monarchy, a representative type government, and so it was something we could understand and which we could support.

Q: Were Malaysia and Singapore also in your peripheral?

KOREN: No. That was Southwest Asian Affairs.

Q: Did the changeover when Marshall Green was there when Sukarno was sort of edged out of the government--that must have been of considerable concern to you at the time, because it was a very close-run thing, that the communists may have taken over Indonesia.

KOREN: I didn't have Indonesia under my . . .

Q: Well, I was wondering whether there were repercussions of this or that feeling this might have outflanked all our efforts?

KOREN: I think the fact that they succeeded in ousting Sukarno and getting rid of him certainly backed up our efforts in Southeast Asia.

Q: How about Dean Rusk? Did he get involved? Were you seeing him much?

KOREN: No.

Q: Harriman was pretty well . . .

KOREN: You know, anything that Harriman runs, he runs himself. He doesn't need any help. I know he talked to Rusk. We had a thing in Laos, for example, where several allied--if that's the word for them--discussions on Laos, and the director for Southeast Asian Affairs was directly responsible for Laos. I was always tapped to make the exposé on Laos from the point of view of the U.S. Butler was the foreign minister of Britain at that time. I can't remember who was the French minister. At any rate, that's the only time I really had anything to do with Rusk.

Q: How about President Kennedy? He had a habit of sometimes calling down at a lower level. Did he stay out of Asian affairs because of Harriman?

KOREN: No, no. I was on the telephone one time with Mr. Kennedy at the time the Diem brothers were captured and he wanted to know what happened to them.

Q: This is shortly before his death, too.

KOREN: Yes.

Q: This is in early November of 1963.

KOREN: Yes.

Q: Were you able to tell him anything?

KOREN: Nothing, except that we knew that they had been captured and were put in the Army personnel carrier. That's all we knew at that time. We didn't know until afterwards that they had been shot.

But you're quite right. One of the methods Mr. Kennedy had of getting right down to the last man he thought would know the answer.

Q: I know this as a personal aside. My name is Kennedy, and when I was in the Department at the time and sometimes when I would call and they'd say, "Mr. So and So isn't here. Who's calling?" I'd say, "Well, my name is Kennedy." And all of a sudden, electricity would start shooting out and I'd have to quickly explain who I was, because everybody in the Department was rather nervous that the President might be calling.

KOREN: You're quite right. He did. You're quite right that Southeast Asian affairs, particularly in Vietnam, was number one in his priority, very close to it.

Q: You moved out of here all of a sudden. You were appointed as ambassador to Congo and Brazzaville in 1964, and you served then until 1966. How did this come about? I mean, here you were in Southeast Asian Affairs, and all of a sudden you're off to a country in Africa.

KOREN: Well, I suspect that what it was was Kennedy was looking around for people that were recommended to him, and I had been recommended to him probably by Harriman. There was the question of, "Where could he go?" and at that time, the repository for career Foreign Service officers was Africa. They didn't mind, as long as somebody had been selected to be an ambassador and had passed all through the White House vetting, which they did. Mr. Kennedy did. He had one person particularly who was the selector of ambassadors.

Q: Who was that, do you remember?

KOREN: Ronald McPhee, his name was. He was one of them. I forget the man. I remember the only inclination I had and indication I had that I was going to be an ambassador was being called over to the White House and interviewed by this individual.

Q: You went in '64, but you had been appointed under the Kennedy Administration?

KOREN: Yes. My appointment was on Mr. Kennedy's desk when he was assassinated, and the actual appointment was by President Johnson.

Q: Who told everybody not to submit resignations as called for by protocol and they went ahead with most of the appointments.

KOREN: No, no. I didn't have any specific notification from anybody in the White House except the man who selected ambassadors. He was a career ambassador selector, so I was just all of a sudden one.

Q: How did you feel about going to the Congo?

KOREN: I didn't know anything about it.

Q: But one went where one was sent?

KOREN: That's right. Frankly, I was glad to be selected.

Q: Also, I imagine by that time you were glad to be out of the hot house of the Southeast Asian thing, which was just getting more and more intense all the time.

KOREN: Well, as a matter of fact, to be quite frank, my satisfaction at being selected, knowing to be selected as ambassador, outweighed my relief or anything. I enjoyed Southeast Asian Affairs. I had a lot of fun in it. I would be happy to stay there.

Q: Could you explain what were American interests in--we'll call it the Congo, because the state remained called the Congo, but at one point there was a Congo (Leopoldville) and a Congo (Brazzaville), and later the Belgian Congo turned into Zaire, but we'll just call it the Congo. But what were our interests in the Congo? We're talking about 1964.

KOREN: In Brazzaville?

Q: Brazzaville, yes.

KOREN: Very small. Quite a few of phosphates, but primarily it was a foothold on the corner of Africa, which was, at that time when I went there, there were, as I remember, 23 embassies, all of whom were Western oriented. When I left, I suppose there were six: Britain, France, U.S., West Germany. And the rest of them were all communists: North Korea, China--

Q: East Germany, probably.

KOREN: Yes. Well, the time they were there, they were all Western oriented.

Q: Well, in the first place, when you went there, what was the government of the Congo and what was its outlook? We're talking about 1964, when you first arrived.

KOREN: They had a brand-new independent government.

Q: It had been part of the French empire at one time.

KOREN: Had been part of the French empire, and like all the African nations, they were emerging in independence. The first election had been held and the president elected. And it was, as I say, primarily a West-oriented regime, but that changed historic Africa.

Q: You've made sort of a flip-over sign. What caused the flip-over while you there? How did we see it?

KOREN: Well, it had not been a great earthshaking event as far as the U.S. Government was concerned. It was primarily from the point of view of those who were assigned there. It amounted to the fact that the prime minister was communist oriented and he was the one who called the shots, and he was the one who began a change to a one-party system, and the whole thing suddenly did a 180 from--

Q: Was this done with military power, or was it just sort of a decision on the part of the prime minister?

KOREN: No. The military power behind the man who did it, but there was no bloodshed or anything spent at all. There was some terrorist action, but no bloodshed at all.

Q: I would assume that before this switch came, the French had predominate influence there. Did they play any role in trying to stop this? Did you cooperate with them, or were we trying to do anything, or was there anything we could do?

KOREN: Well, there was nothing we could do, and the French were there, background influence and aid, didn't do anything drastic at all. They allowed it to happen.

Q: Do you feel that maybe if they had really turned the screws--

KOREN: If they had turned the screws around, they could have--I wouldn't say they could have stopped it, but they could have certainly slowed it down.

Q: Were you over talking to the French ambassador and saying, "My God, why don't you do something?"

KOREN: No. We tried that, and he was a completely useless individual.

Q: Do you feel it was more ineptitude on the part of the French?

KOREN: I think it was lack of foresight on the part of the French. They didn't realize what was happening.

Q: It wasn't a matter of just letting it go?

KOREN: It wasn't a question of washing their hands. All of a sudden they woke up and found their hands were sticky.

Q: In the first place, how important was phosphate to us? Was this sort of driving our interest in the area, or was it just a minor . . .

KOREN: No, minor. We had no major interest in there at all.

Q: We had, we felt, the whole Western European group had a lot of interest in what was happening at that time in the Congo, particularly the efforts of Katanga to break away and you had the Simba revolt. How did that play in the Congo (Brazzaville)?

KOREN: Well, of course, that became affluent. At the time when we were there, the major problems were with the former Belgian Congo, Congo-leo, and the most extraordinary thing, each that we called the "Big Congo" and the "Little Congo" watched each other like leopards, interpreting every move as a hostile move.

Q: They were absolutely--

KOREN: Impeccable. There was so much jealousy between the two. In the old days, from talking with Mack Godley and others, the people from the Congo (Leopoldville) would come over for wine and cheese and fun in Brazzaville. But when we were there, the laces were completely severed, and we were not allowed to cross over to--

Q: It was just across the river, wasn't it?

KOREN: It was across the river, yes. And the river, you know, at that point is very swift moving, but it's hardly an obstacle. You get across there in a rowboat if you took your time and knew how to do it. And that was above the falls.

Q: Did you really feel what was happening there was sort of isolated, it wasn't impacted anywhere else?

KOREN: It was only of interest to the representatives that were there who were immediately affected.

Q: Well, did you feel that you were close to being expelled at some point?

KOREN: Oh, yes. Several times.

Q: In a way, did we care?

KOREN: No. I don't think they gave a damn in Washington.

Q: One way or the other. [Laughter]

KOREN: They didn't give a damn.

Q: I must say that when I look up the Congo (Brazzaville) in the publications which deal all over the world, there are some years when it doesn't even appear. Could you deal with the government there?

KOREN: I could in the beginning, but even offers or threats of taking away aid--we had very little aid.

Q: They couldn't care less?

KOREN: They couldn't care less. It was what you might call a non-profitable existence.

Q: Well, sometimes a part of the justification is, "Okay, you keep the flag flying, because you don't know what's going to happen." I mean, these things can turn around, and if you walk away, you're not there to take advantage. Did you have that feeling?

KOREN: When I was pulled out of there in May, I think as far as the Department was concerned and as far as the U.S. Government was concerned, they could have shut down the place completely and not have missed it. And I came back and I argued from the point of view of keeping the flag flying and primarily as a listening post. This was the core of the spread of communism in Central Africa, and I said, "Just keep somebody there. I don't care who the hell it is."

Q: What sort of things were you getting from your position there? Were you getting an idea of how the communist movement was working within the area?

KOREN: Yes. See how it might spread, what were the things that were attractive to the masses and how they were playing them in the Congo and how that could be transplanted to another entity, another nation.

Q: You obviously had a very small staff there. Did you have a problem keeping up morale under those circumstances?

KOREN: Surprisingly enough, I had a large staff, because it had been right from the beginning. For instance, we had FAA people there and that sort of thing, and we had international representatives, WHO and international aviation people and that sort of thing, so we had, from the point of view of our intrinsic interests, we had a much larger staff than we really needed, but they were regional people.

Q: Was that being phased down while you were there?

KOREN: Well, yes. I mean, after I left, I guess six months after that, they shut down the embassy completely.

Q: We might move on then to your major assignment. You left Brazzaville in 1966, and for a very short time you were with Intelligence and Research. And then you were made, as I have it here, deputy to the deputy ambassador in Saigon from 1966 to 1968. How did that assignment come about, and what was your position?

KOREN: Well, they wanted somebody to in effect run the counterinsurgency effort.

Q: That's CORDS, C-O-R-D-S.

KOREN: It wasn't named CORDS at that time.

Q: What was the history of the counterinsurgency movement from our side prior to your being appointed there?

KOREN: Rather bleak, as a matter of fact. You're probably aware of the failure of the hearts and minds of the people and the over-optimistic reports that were put out by the

enemy's government, and various efforts had been tried and this was an effort to pull everything together. Probably, that was the reason that I was--

Q: Were you there during a sort of major dispute of who's going to run this whole thing? Whether it's the Army or the CIA or the State Department?

KOREN: Well, I think that was the reason the State Department won and I was sent out there.

Q: Whom did you report to? What was the chain of command as far as this goes?

KOREN: My immediate boss was Bill Porter, who was the deputy ambassador, but I had direct access to Cabot Lodge.

Q: Who was the ambassador until April of '67. What were the orders that you got or the instructions or the guidance you got from Lodge and from Porter?

KOREN: Well, nothing was in writing, but the indications were that, "Here's what you have to do, now go ahead and do it."

Q: What sort of things were they saying you had to do?

KOREN: Well, make order out of chaos. What they wanted was somebody to take charge and make the decisions.

Q: This is fine, but here you're talking about subduing a counterinsurgency in a country and we're an outside power. What did you have to deal with it?

KOREN: You had the various units, the AID, USIA, and, of course, the ever-present military.

Q: American military.

KOREN: To be quite honest with you, it was a very confusing situation, and I didn't know enough about what was going on.

Q: Later they have developed rather fancy courses in counterinsurgency, but there was none of this.

KOREN: Oh, no, no. You just were there, and, to be quite frank with you, I didn't know much. It wasn't until I went up to I Corps, the First Corps area.

Q: That's up north from the demilitarized zone down to Quang Ngai Province.

KOREN: That was when I realized--of course, I had been in Saigon for maybe two or three months. I knew something was going on, but I remember responding to a correspondent's question at one time what the situation was, and I said, "Confused." And it was terribly confused down there. Everybody was trying to do his thing, and we had USIA, we had AID, and we had the military.

Q: We're talking about you were going up to I Corps because you found that you really didn't know what was going on after you'd been there for several months.

KOREN: They kicked me up there. That's beside the point, but Rusk and McNamara and all those came out, and they didn't like what I said, so they said, "Get rid of that bastard."

Q: What were you saying?

KOREN: I was trying to tell them that I didn't know what the problem was, and I made one major mistake because I said at the beginning, "You know, I think we ought to find some other term besides 'pacification,'" and oh, boy.

Q: Whose favorite word was that?

KOREN: I don't know.

Q: It strikes me as McNamara. Maybe I'm wrong.

KOREN: I think it probably was McNamara, I don't know. It was the wrong thing to say and they told me to forget about it. [Laughter] So they gave me the opportunity of going back to the Department, and I said, "Well, I was over there and I wanted to stay."

So Cabot Lodge said, "Well, how would you like to go up to I Corps?"

And I said, "Fine."

Q: You were placed by somebody, or was the job once again re-changed when you left Saigon?

KOREN: It was changed. There was no boss, I think. As a matter of fact, it was taken over by President Johnson, and he sent one of his men out there, whose name I've forgotten.

Q: Komer?

KOREN: Komer, Bob Komer. He was supposed to do it, and he was the one who, at that time--I don't know whether it was Bob or--before that it became Civil Operations Revolutionary Developments. But the whole problem was rethought, the whole effort, and the people, as I was in I Corps, became the deputy to the commander for Civil Operations Revolutionary Development.

Q: So basically you became a part of the military, rather than being run out of the embassy at that point?

KOREN: Yes.

Q: I mean, at least in the field.

KOREN: Yes. It was all part and parcel of the mission consul. That was a meeting that was held by the ambassador every day, as I recall, chaired by the ambassador, and that had all the elements in it: USIA, AID, the heads of those agencies, the political counselor, who was Phil Habib at that time, Rog and Westmoreland, and the whole lot of them.

Q: Before we move up to I Corps, what was your impression of some of the people. Let's talk about Lodge first. How deeply engaged was he with the operations there?

KOREN: I think he was completely immersed in it, and his effort was primarily in making and helping to obtain a viable Vietnamese government.

Q: In some ways, you must have had a feeling of a certain harking back to the Laotian situation, because this is a period of time when there were revolving military governments, weren't there?

KOREN: A very austere individual, Cabot Lodge, and very stiff and somewhat unbending, but a very nice person underneath. When you got down underneath the facade, so to speak, he was a very nice gent. I liked him.

Q: How about Bill Porter?

KOREN: Bill Porter was very smart, very good, and in a quiet way, very effective. For instance, I remember one refrain that he often used, not in a negative sense or to get under Westie's skin or anything like that, but he would say, "But the night belongs to the VC." And, sort of in a plaintive way, we all felt that. It was a tough operation.

Q: How did you feel about Westmoreland?

KOREN: Well, I think he was a very good commander in what you might call the normal sense. I mean, West, he had everything you'd expect of a leader. He had knowledge, he had brains, he got people out of their foxholes and that sort of thing. But he was a product--so was I--of the World War II, and I don't think he understood. I don't think he found the key. God knows who has the key to guerilla warfare, the type of warfare we were facing in Vietnam. For instance, "The night belongs to the VC."

Q: Well, how did you feel? You arrived there and your first few months you were looking at the situation. How was the war going from our point of view? How did you see it?

KOREN: Well, we got the impression it was going all right, and it wasn't until the Tet Offensive--

Q: In February of '68. But at the time you saw it, did you see the guerilla warfare and the "night belonging to the VC" as being an absolute must that you had to conquer, and did you see progress in this? Or did you see this as being almost an irritant?

KOREN: Well, it was a terrible irritant, but the progress was gauged primarily by the body count, and God knows we had enough of that.

Q: Was there any feeling that this body count business--I mean, one, politically it's not the best way to judge something, and the other one is, when you start relying on statistics, whether they're bodies or what have you, you're asking for real problems. You know, people meeting norms, double counting, counting civilians as Viet Cong, etc., etc., etc. Were we questioning this as a way of measuring how we were doing, or was this pretty much the accepted?

KOREN: Pretty much accepted at that time.

Q: At that time. All these things are so much easier in retrospect.

KOREN: Very much so. But this was a low-intensity conflict, and all of our training and background had been in the high-intensity conflict.

Q: What was the feeling when you arrived there about the ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam?

KOREN: It was coming along but slowly, and that was one of the things we tried our damndest to--I say "we," the United States Government and all its efforts were trying to shore up the ARVN, give them some backbone, something strong to lean on, and I think that was the biggest failure that we had there. Some of the ARVN were fine. Some of the ARVN people were good friends of mine and sort of young men as a whole.

I can remember thinking back to the South Vietnamese day, Southeast Asian day, "What is it that the communists have that we don't seem to be able to instill in our people? Where's the fire?"

Q: This is a question I think all of us have asked again and again. Obviously, the men in the Vietnamese Army really had a lot to lose, I mean, it's very obvious, when the place went down the drain. Yet, what was it that didn't spark the leadership at all levels to exert itself in this? Do you ever have any feel for why the communists seemed to do it and we didn't?

KOREN: No. That's still a comment that I don't have the answer to.

Q: I have to confess I thought long and hard about it, too. I don't know, but there is something there.

KOREN: God knows the war colleges are doing their best to try to find the key to leadership right now. Sometimes it works. The most recent example is Hackworth. Do you know that story?

Q: Yes. There's a book. Was it called Turn About or something?

KOREN: No. About Face.

Q: About Face, yes.

KOREN: Well, Dave Hackworth was an Army officer who kicked against the traces, but he was considered the finest battalion commander that--I can't remember who said so, whether it was Westmoreland or--

Q: Abrams?

KOREN: Or even higher up--they'd ever seen, and you can see why. He had three Distinguished Service Crosses. He had nine Silver Stars. He had three or four Purple Hearts. You know, you name it. He was the most decorated man. I mean, he makes Woodfield, or whatever the hell his name was--

Q: York?

KOREN: York. Pale, and also, Douglas MacArthur. He has something on his side. He says we have yet to learn how to fight that type of warfare. He said we didn't do it in Vietnam, and he got disgusted with Vietnam and he sort of threw by the faces of Westmoreland and all the rest of the generals. He himself was not made a general and so he quit. That's beside the point, but . . .

Q: No, no. But it's an interesting point. Now, when you went up to I Corps, could you describe a bit the command structure and where you fit into this? We're still talking about 1966, aren't we?

KOREN: Well, at that time, Lou Walt, who was a Marine. The Marines were in charge of I Corps and he was the Marine commander and the next in command to the ARVN commander, whose name was Lam. I fitted into that very nicely, because Lou and I became very good friends and close friends, and he gave me every opportunity, every chance in the world, to do whatever I felt was necessary, he would okay. He was the commander, though.

Q: Well now, what were you doing?

KOREN: The first thing I did was to fire the AID people and change the command there.

Q: What was the problem?

KOREN: Well, they just weren't any good, that's all basically. AID, I got rid of them, and I got a new man in the CIA and USIA. They were all sort of grouped together. We worked together, the three or four of us, we worked together. I'll say one thing. I had a hell of a time getting my deputy changed, because the Department did not back me up. I asked for a guy by name and they said, "Oh, we can't spare him. He's one of our best." I thought, "By God. If we needed our best, then we needed them out there."

That was the kind of attitude I got from the lower level of the Department, and I didn't do too well by Bill Bundy, either. Because although he and I were good friends, I said something to the effect, "Please don't put out any casualty figures until you've check them with me." This was when we were losing some of our people.

And I got back something about, "I'm running the Bureau for Asian Affairs."

Q: Well, what was the problem? The figures you felt weren't correct?

KOREN: Well, they needed to be vetted, yes. You know, the first figures you get are always wrong. They've got to be checked. That's the way the body count is always wrong. I mean, for instance, the My Lai massacre, so called, happened when I was up in I Corps, and people have asked me time and again, "What did you know about My Lai?" I didn't know a damn thing about My Lai, except that the body count was particularly high that day. Who were they?

Q: Villages. This is a slaughter essentially of civilians by a platoon of American soldiers.

KOREN: But we had a very good working relationship as far as I Corps was concerned. Not only the commander but the armored commander was a good guy, too. And the CIA chap and the USIA people were all very good.

I had some help in that respect from the people in Saigon. Barry Zorthian, for example, with USIA, he was a good friend of mine, and he said, "Whatever you want, I'll back you up," that type of thing.

Q: You had this team together, but what would they do? How does one go about this?

KOREN: Well, first of all you'd visit as much as possible the various centers of population and see for yourself whether ARVN was lacking, or the Army or the Marines were overstepping their bounds, or anything like that. And then we set up a--what the hell did we call it? I can't remember the name of the thing, but a working setup whereby all the elements, the psychological and, you know, what you'd expect the USIA to do and the CIA to do, the intelligence and the psychological effort, we coordinated all those together. In

effect, we would say, "That's your problem, that's your problem," and they'd go to it. I had some perfectly fine gents working for me.

Q: Was the Phoenix Program in--

KOREN: That's what I'm talking about, the Phoenix Program. That was begun in I Corps.

Q: Part of this was a way of, in polite terms, eliminating the professional cadre of the Viet Cong.

KOREN: It was exposing them, yes.

Q: Exposing them. How did this work?

KOREN: How did it work?

Q: Yes. How did it work? I mean, what would we do?

KOREN: Well, we would get the villagers and the Chinese to finger the people, and we worked on a one-to-one basis, really. See, I was lucky in some respects. The people I had who spoke Vietnamese, learned Vietnamese, one Marine lieutenant colonel spoke very good Vietnamese. He was invaluable in that respect, and he was the advisor to the mayor of Da Nang. That gave him a whole lot of--

Q: Let's say some of the villagers would say, "So and so is part of the Viet Cong cadre." What would we do? Did we send in hit squads? Did we arrest?

KOREN: No. We would tell the ARVN and they would get rid of them. It was usually a matter of killing them off.

Q: yes. So basically we would inform the ARVN.

KOREN: We would inform the ARVN, and sometimes we would do it ourselves.

Q: When you say "do it ourselves," with who? Our military or the CIA or what?

KOREN: CIA.

Q: Were you ever worried about this being sort of a rogue elephant that might get out of control or something like that?

KOREN: No, because I trusted the CIA type. I think that's the main reason.

Q: How was the ARVN performing up where you were? What was your evaluation of the ARVN out in the field?

KOREN: It was better led from the top.

Q: Well, Lam had a reputation of being pretty corrupt.

KOREN: Well, if he did, I'm sure he does. There's no Vietnamese that isn't somewhat tinged. But he was a good commander and he worked well with the Marine commander.

Q: Would he go out in the field, Lam?

KOREN: Oh, yes, he did. Not as much as the Marines would like, of course.

Q: That wasn't the style. The Marine Corps had their own particular brand of pacification, where they had small teams with a medic and this type of thing. There you were in the field. Were you seeing a difference between them and, say, an, American Army unit doing it? Or was this show more than real?

KOREN: The Marine--what the hell do they call them? Combined Action Platoon.(CAP)

Q: Pacification teams or something? They have a fancy term.

KOREN: They were very good and very effective. And sometimes they were overrun because the ARVN didn't perform, so all wasn't sweetness and light in I Corps by any means. There was a drawback, no question about that. But those Marine teams were very good and very dedicated and very brave, because they were out in the various little towns.

Q: Very much exposed.

KOREN: Very much exposed and they did it. I felt, that the Marines had a group because it's very easy to say the Marines. There was only one division. I mean, well, there was more than one division, but there was one command. They were all Marines, and so the Marines, I think, did a better job and a more centrally-controlled job than any of the American divisions did. I became a very strong advocate of the Marine effort.

Q: Well, something that struck me in my time in Vietnam, which was '69 to '70, was how quickly leadership was turned over, particularly at the officer level. Six months in the field and six months out, and one had the feeling that at least the Army was turning this into more of a training exercise rather than putting their best troops forward and giving it all out. Did you have this feeling?

KOREN: To a certain extent, but I think that was more the Army than it was the Marine Corps.

Q: Yes. Didn't you have an airborne division?

KOREN: Oh, yes, we had an airborne. One Hundred and First were there.

Q: Did you find the Army, did they have a feel for the type of war, or again do you think they were suffering from the same problem all of us had of not really knowing how to fight this war?

KOREN: I think they suffered from the same uncertainty, the same tentativeness, without some positive direction that the Marines were able to do from their--because they say the Marines--

Q: Pacific action teams, or something like that?

KOREN: The Marines had a special term for it. It's just gone out of my head.

Q: Well, that's all right.

KOREN: I think it was easier for the Marines to do than, say, the Army. That means a whole lot of varying divisions around the Army is one thing, but you can't say that the MACV commander, he had to delegate to the various division commanders and the corps commanders. But the Marines were all by themselves. They had just one. (?)

Q: Enlarged division.

KOREN: Yes, enlarged division, but very much of a one area they knew they were responsible for.

Q: Was there much slopping? I mean, was there rivalry between the four corps as far as people doing the same job you were doing, trying to say we're doing better than you are, or passing information back and forth?

KOREN: Despite the common efforts, I don't think there was a cohesion between the four corps people.

Q: So really you were each sort of operating within your area. I mean, they were different, a different mix, but you didn't feel that this was--I mean, you felt you could try anything. You weren't getting all sorts of, "Now do this and do that."

KOREN: I think it was completely a matter of self-starting and self-initiative.

Q: Weren't the Korean Marines up in your area?

KOREN: Yes.

Q: I remember a friend of mine saying they were a tough bunch but it was hard to get them going, because they were under orders not to take casualties and so they were more

passive. They watched out for their own protection, but really did play much of a passive role.

KOREN: Perfectly true, I think. Their perimeter defense was excellent, but they didn't strike out, you know, just as the Philippine contingent was very constrained and so was the Thais.

Q: They were there but more for--

KOREN: More symbolic.

Q: More symbolic. Were you bothered much by the Press Corps? Bothered is the wrong term, but I mean, did the Press Corps play much of a role in your area, or were they pretty much down?

KOREN: Pretty much down in Saigon. They would come up to I Corps because they had the Press Corps. The most famous group was when Joe Alsop and--who was that guy--they came up to I Corps. Everybody came up to I Corps because it was the DMZ type of operation. But from the point of view of bother, no, I don't think you could say they bothered us. The only real bother we had was Teddy Kennedy.

Q: Could you explain what happened with Teddy Kennedy?

KOREN: Oh, that bastard. I disliked him from the word "go." But he came up and, of course, I was the designated--

Q: Senior civilian?

KOREN: I can't remember who it was. Bob Cushman, I guess, was the Marine commander at that time, and in effect he just washed his hands of him and said, "It's all yours." So I had him in my house and quarters, and he, in effect, said, "I want to see casualties and I want to see the burn casualties and napalm casualties and all." Well, I had this perfectly wonderful little feisty doctor who was one of the group that came over and volunteered.

Q: Yes. There were a whole series of volunteer doctors who came over to treat civilian casualties.

KOREN: He said, "If he wants to see casualties, give him to me." And I said, "Okay." So we arranged that he would go to the civilian hospital. Well, you've been to the civilian hospitals in Vietnam. You know they're no place for a weak stomach, and I must say, a couple of times, too, my stomach began. And various incredible, something I suspect that Kennedy had never seen in his life before, these terrible burn patients and family all clustered around trying to take care of them and the bloody mattresses and the whole sphere. And I must say Kennedy, he looked a little pale around the gills, and he finally said he'd had enough.

But the thing that I remember distinctly was he asked the doctors, "Show me a burn patient."

The doctors said, "Senator, nobody can tell whether the burn is from napalm or from a upset gasoline stove."

"Now you tell me what you think."

And he just gave it right back to him. He said, "That's absolutely impossible. A burn is a burn, period." And so that took care of that problem. Of course, phosphors you can tell. So Kennedy finally gave up and said he'd seen all he had to.

Q: Another figure, I don't think he worked in your area, but did you run across him at all, because he's become a man of some controversy, John Paul Vann?

KOREN: John Paul Vann, sure. I knew him.

Q: What is your evaluation of him?

KOREN: Well, he was unquestionably a controversial figure, and I'd say that John Vann has some damned good ideas and I've confessed to trying to plagiarize some of his ideas and some of his methods.

Q: He was working in II Corps.

KOREN: He was in II Corps, yes. I think I knew John before I even left Saigon. But any rate, I think his problem was he was too much of a egotist. And I wouldn't say he did everything from the point of view of "what can it do for me," but there was always a grain about him. I don't want to do him an injustice by any means. I have not read that book.

Q: It's an interesting book, but I'm sure you'd find A Bright and Shining Lie.

KOREN: Who wrote it?

Q: Sheehan.

KOREN: Neil Sheehan. I knew Neil. He was a pretty good man, I think. I haven't read his book.

Q: But you say you found some things that he was doing there that you would borrow from?

KOREN: Oh, yes. I can't put my finger on them, but he had damn good ideas and he had certain of methods I thought, "Boy, that's something I can work with," that type of thing. But he was a man I would say of lively imagination and complete dedication. I liked John, but he was not a close friend of mine.

Q: How did you up in I Corps feel about the operation, although you weren't in it, but, you know, there was an awful lot of concern. I can recall back here in Washington as the Marine Corps held onto Khe Sanh. Was there unease? Was there questioning? With your background, both political and military, how did you feel about this thing?

KOREN: Well, I must confess, I thought that Khe Sanh was similar to Dien Bien Phu in some respect, because God knows, the VC were tunneling right up to the parallel, so to speak, and we knew that. I remember talking to Bob Cushman, the commander of the Marines at that time I was there.

"You know, I think, Bob, we ought to get out of there." That was just my feeling, because I knew the way they operated, and all of a sudden we'd be faced with "Well, here they are, right in front of us." I don't know. That's the way it pretty much came out.

Q: It's still very controversial, because in one case we said we brought a lot together so we could bomb the hell out of them, and they did take quite a few casualties. But the other thing, we had lost mobility and we ended up taking something which we abandoned later on.

KOREN: I was just about to make a comparison with Khe Sanh and--the thought I had went out of my mind.

Q: Of course our strategy at that time was how to get the North Vietnamese Army to confront our troops so we could bring our superior fire power, and this was felt to be "if they want to do it, we can go after them that way."

KOREN: I know what I was trying to think of--drawing an analogy between that point of view and the Tet Offensive.

Q: If we could talk about Tet, that would pretty well end it.

KOREN: I know that they stopped the conventional wisdom, but I always felt, and I said at the time, that I thought we took a hell of a beating in Tet.

Q: I was going to say, I Corps was probably the hardest hit. Hue fell. Do you feel that it is not only a political disaster, but also a military one?

KOREN: Well, not entirely. It seemed to me that the fact that they were able to do that without any warning at all meant to me that we didn't have the proper tentacles out and according to.... psychologically, we took a hell of a beating.

Q: Politically, of course, it was an absolute disaster. What happened to you during Tet? Were you there?

KOREN: No. I had a Marine steward and I said, "Let's get in the car and go down and see what's going on." And so we went downtown.

Q: In Da Nang?

KOREN: Da Nang. Starting down at Feely Broad Street and all of a sudden there was firing coming out, and I said, "The hell with this." I've never seen a man turn a wheel so fast in my life. [Laughter] He was a big, powerful guy, and we turned the jeep and we turned in the street, it doesn't seem to me now much wider than that, and we beat it to the other direction, because I didn't see any point in being fired on.

So we came back and the sky was lit up, of course, all around by the various things. There was some fires that had been started that added to it and there was constant shelling going on. So we decided the best thing to do was to stay put, and we didn't crawl under the bed, but we put barricades up. We lugged all the furniture we could and put it up, because I had a house and we barricaded ourselves as much as we could and just got our weapons and just waited. We were sure they were coming for us. They would sooner or later.

Q: Da Nang was relatively quickly taken over by our forces.

KOREN: Oh, yes.

Q: Hue was the . . .

KOREN: Hue was something different. That's where Phil Manhard was. Did you ever talk to him?

Q: Yes, but not on that but on his China experience. I'm trying to get back to him.

One last question on Vietnam. What happened to the pacification effort after Tet that you saw in the immediate aftermath of the pacification? Was this in a way helped because of the destruction of the Viet Cong cadre, or was your apparatus pretty well destroyed?

KOREN: It was a considerable blow to the Phoenix Program, and psychologically it was a hell of a blow to the whole operation, the whole pacification effort.

Q: Well, you left Vietnam in 1968, didn't you?

KOREN: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about it when you left? How did you feel where you were going? Because this is a time of some optimism, I think, on the part of some.

KOREN: My feeling was that we were making some progress. I think that's the best way I can describe it. Of course, from the point of view of I Corps, we had maintained the borders

pretty well so that I thought that would gradually spread itself and spread its influence further down to other corps areas and give us the thing that we needed as much as anything else was confidence and we needed some accomplishments so we could say, "Oh, boy. We're on the right track. Let's keep going."

Q: Mr. Ambassador, we're under instructions from your wife to wind this up.

KOREN: I'm sorry.

Q: No, this has been fine. We covered the main points. You were an inspector for a period of time, and you retired when? In what year?

KOREN: '71.

Q: '71. Well, we'll leave the inspection period out. The last question I try to ask of everybody, if somebody comes to you today, a young person, and says, "Mr. Ambassador, what about the Foreign Service as a career?" How would you reply to that?

KOREN: I would urge them to take it if they have the necessary qualifications. And the qualifications, I would say, is intelligence and experience and ability to take charge of something and see it through to the end. In other words, a take-charge mentality. I would urge them to do that, but I would not try to glamorize it in any respect. I would say, "This is tough."

Q: You had what one could call a rather tough career. I mean, difficult assignments.

KOREN: Well, it was fun. But I would have no hesitancy in saying to the individual, "Go to it," but it's not easy. First of all, the mental side is very exacting. I didn't find it that way. I mean, not that I'm brainy and all, but I didn't have to take the written exam, being in Manpower. And all the questions that I would have in my mind is "Is the individual"--

MRS. KOREN: He won't be able to talk for a day.

Q: I know it. Well, we're just winding this up.

KOREN: I would say that you can't gauge the individual that's just out of college, say, or thinking of going into college, whether they have what I consider the managerial talents and the leadership talents. The military talks about leadership all the time, but it's the same thing with the Foreign Service. As you know, the man in charge is the leader, whether he's the political counselor or whatever it happens to be.

That is something that's an intangible that you don't know very often until it's brought out. It's tested. You can't really test it. You can write, "How would you handle such and such a situation?" But the main thing is the ability to react in the proper way at the proper time and

the necessary time and marshal everything together, because the old story, "You don't penetrate armor by just throwing rocks at it."

Q: Well, Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you very much, and I really appreciate this.

End of interview