

Excerpts from the Vietnam Country Reader

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VIETNAM

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

Merritt N. Cootes	1936	Temporary Consul, Saigon
Kingsley W. Hamilton	1940-1942	Consular Officer, Saigon
Albert Stoffel	1946-1948	Vice Consul, Saigon
Oscar Vance Armstrong	1950	Chinese Language Officer, Saigon
John F. Melby	1950	City Unspecified, Vietnam
Charlotte Loris	1950-1952	Clerk, Saigon
Thomas J. Corcoran	1950-1953 1954-1955	Political Officer, Saigon Consul, Hanoi
Paul M. Kattenburg	1950-1955 1963-1964 1964-1965	Intelligence Analyst, Indochinese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC Country Officer, East Asia Bureau, Washington, DC Political Officer, Policy Planning, Washington, DC
L. Michael Rives	1951-1952	Political Officer, Hanoi
Scott Cohen	1951-1953	Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) Officer, Saigon
Richard C. Matheron	1951-1953 1953-1956	Special Technical and Economic Mission, Saigon Special Technical and Economic Mission, Hue
Bertha Potts	1952-1954	Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS, Saigon

William J. Cunningham	1952-1954	General Services Assistant, Saigon
Howard R. Simpson	1952-1955 1964-1965	Press Officer, Saigon Information Officer, Saigon
Samuel Clifford Adams, Jr.	1952-1955	Education Advisor, Saigon
Randolph A. Kidder	1953-1955 1955	Political Officer, Saigon Chargé d'Affaires, Saigon
George Lambrakis	1954-1955	Trainee, USIS, Saigon
Robert F. Franklin	1954-1956 1962	Radio Officer, USIS, Hanoi and Saigon Press Officer, Saigon
John A. Lacey	1954-1956 1965-1966	Intelligence Analyst, Vietnamese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC Country Officer, Burma/Cambodia Desk, Washington, DC
Rufus C. Phillips, III	1954-1955 1957-1959	U.S. Army and Central Intelligence Agency, Saigon Assistant Director, Rural Affairs, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Vientiane, Laos
Robert J. MacAlister	1955	International Rescue Committee, City Unspecified, Vietnam
John A. McKesson, III	1955-1957	Political Officer, Saigon
Robert E. Barbour	1955-1956 1956-1957 1957-1958	Language Training, Saigon Political Officer, Saigon Principal Officer, Hue
Robert Lochner	1955-1958	Deputy PAO, USIS, Saigon
Samuel T. Williams	1955-1960	Military Assistance Advisor Group, Saigon
Christian A. Chapman	1957-1958	Political Officer, Saigon
David I. Hitchcock, Jr.	1957-1958	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Hue
Chester H. Opal	1957-1960	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Saigon

Alan Fisher	1957-1963	Motion Picture Officer, USIS, Saigon
Elbridge Durbrow	1957-1961 1961-1965	Ambassador, Vietnam NATO, Paris
John W. Kimball	1958-1960	Assistant Security Officer, Saigon
Theodore J.C. Heavner	1958-1959 1960-1961 1961-1963	Political Officer, Hue Political Officer, Saigon Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Joseph A. Mendenhall	1958-1959 1959-1962 1963-1965 1964 1964-1965 1968-1970	Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC Political Officer, Saigon Deputy Director, Southeast Asia Affairs, Washington, DC Chairman, Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC Vietnam Affairs, East Asia Bureau, Washington, DC Vietnam Affairs, USAID, Washington, DC
Cecil S. Richardson	1959-1961	Political Officer/Staff Aide, Saigon
Ben Franklin Dixon	1959-1962	Political Officer, Thailand
James Howe	1959-1962	Program Officer, International Cooperation Administration (predecessor to USAID), City Unspecified, Vietnam
George F. Bogardus	1959-1963	Economic Officer, Saigon
Neal Donnelly	1960-1961	Assistant CAO, Saigon
Thomas F. Conlon	1960-1962	Principal Officer, Saigon
James Marvin Montgomery	1960-1962 1962-1964	Economic Officer, Saigon State Department; Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Keith Earl Adamson	1960-1964	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
John M. Anspacher	1960-1964	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Saigon

John J. Helble	1960-1961	Political Officer, Saigon
	1961-1964	Consul, Hue
	1965-1967	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
	1973	Political Officer, Saigon
Douglas Eugene Pike	1960-1962	Assistant Motion Picture Officer, USIS, Saigon
	1962-1964	Information Officer, USIS, Saigon
	1965-1967	Assistant Chief Planning Division, USIS, Saigon
	1968-1975	Regional Information Specialist, USIS, Saigon
Thomas L. Hughes	1961	Administrative Assistant to the Under Secretary, Washington, DC
Robert E. Barbour	1961-1963	Political Officer, Saigon
William C. Trueheart	1961-1963	Deputy Chief of Mission, Saigon
Frederick Ernest Nolting, Jr.	1961-1963	Ambassador, Vietnam
James D. Rosenthal	1961-1965	Political Officer, Saigon
Henry L. T. Koren	1961-1964	Director, Southeast Asia Affairs, East Asia Bureau, Washington, DC
	1966-1968	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Saigon
W. Averell Harriman	1961-1963	Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Washington, DC
	1963-1965	Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Washington, DC
	1965-1969	Ambassador-at-Large, Washington, DC
Dean Rusk	1961-1969	Secretary of State, Washington, DC
Frank D. Correl	1962-1963	Program Officer, USAID, Saigon
	1963-1964	Vietnam AID Desk, Washington, DC
Paul D. Harkins	1962-1964	General, US Army, Saigon
Kenneth N. Rogers	1962-1964	RSO General and Staff Aide, Saigon
W. Robert Warne	1962-1964	Assistant Development Officer, USAID, Saigon

Maxwell D. Taylor	1962-1964	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC
	1964-1965	Ambassador, Vietnam
William G. Bradford	1962-1964	Administrative Officer, Saigon
	1974	Administrative Officer, Saigon
Edward L. Rowny	1962-1965	Lt. General, Saigon
Robert H. Miller	1962-1965	Deputy Chief, Political Section, Saigon
	1965-1968	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
	1974-1977	Area Director, Southeast Asia Affairs, Washington, DC
Leonardo Neher	1962-1964	Commercial Officer, Saigon
William R. Tyler	1962-1965	Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, Washington, DC
	1965-1969	Chief of Mission, The Hague, The Netherlands
Frederick W. Flott	1963	Special Assistant to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Saigon
Samuel B. Thomsen	1963-1964	Political Officer, Saigon
	1964-1966	Consul, Hue
Vladimir Lehovich	1963-1965	Rural Affairs Program Officer, USAID, Saigon
	1965-1966	Provincial Reporter, Saigon
Erland Heginbotham	1963-1965	Economic Policy Officer, USAID, Saigon
	1965-1967	Vietnam Desk, USAID, Washington, DC
Joseph P. O'Neill	1963-1965	Political Officer, USAID, Hue
	1965-1968	CORDS, Da Nang
George M. Barbis	1963-1966	Analyst, Laos, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
William Harrison Marsh	1963-1966	Political Officer, Saigon
	1966-1968	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Michael H. Newlin	1963-1968	Political-Military Officer, USRO, Brussels

John R. Burke	1963-1967 1967-1969	Political Officer, Saigon Director, Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
John T. Bennett (Interview with Rutherford Poats)	1963-1965 1973-1975	Economic Counselor, Saigon Economic Counselor, Saigon
Rutherford Poats (See interview with John Bennett)	1963-1967 1964-1966	Bureau Chief, USAID, Washington, DC Assistant Administrator, USAID, Washington, DC
Thomas L. Hughes	1963-1969	Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
Robert C. Haney	1964	Deputy Chief, JUSPAO, Saigon
Thomas F. Conlon	1964	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Broadus Bailey, Jr.	1964-1965	Provincial Advisor, Dalat, Tuyen Duc
U. Alexis Johnson	1964-1965	Deputy Chief of Mission/Deputy Ambassador, Saigon
William N. Turpin	1964-1965	Vietnam Aid Mission, Saigon
Peter M. Cody	1964-1965	Vietnam Desk, USAID, Washington, DC
Ray E. Jones	1964-1965	Embassy and Staffing Protocol Officer, Saigon
David G. Nes	1964-1965	Deputy Chief of Mission, Saigon
Richard J. Dols	1964-1966	Intelligence Analyst, Vietnamese Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
James F. Leonard	1964-1966	Intelligence Analyst, Far East Affairs, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
Philip R. Mayhew	1964-1966	Advisor, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Clayton E. McManaway, Jr.	1964-1965 1965 1965-196?	Program Officer, USAID, Saigon Vietnam Program, Washington, DC Pacification Program Officer, USAID,

	196?-1970	Saigon DoD, MACV, Saigon
Walter A. Lundy	1964-1966 1966	Political Officer, Saigon Principal Officer, Hue
Frank G. Wisner	1964-1967 1967-1968 1968-1969	Staff Aide, AID, Saigon Program Officer, Dinh Tuong Province Senior Advisor, Tuyen Duc Province
Gilbert H. Sheinbaum	1964-1968	Political Officer, USAID, Hue, Hoi An, and Saigon
Barry Zorthian	1964-1968	Chief, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, (JUSPAO), Saigon
John J. McCloy	1964-1968	Ambassador
Harold Kaplan	1964-1967 1967 1968-1969	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Saigon Public Relations Officer, Vietnamese Affairs, The White House, Washington, DC Press Officer, Negotiations with North Vietnamese, Paris, France
H. Freeman Matthews, Jr.	1964-1966 1966-1970	Political Officer, Saigon Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Richard E. Undeland	1964-1969	Field Operations Officer, Saigon
Robert J. McCloskey	1964-1973	State Department Spokesman, Washington, DC
Walter F. Mondale	1965	United States Senator, Minnesota
Ralph J. Katrosh	1965-1966	Vietnamese Affairs, East Asia Bureau, Washington, DC
Robert Don Levine	1965-1966	Embassy Spokesperson, Saigon
Richard M. McCarthy	1965-1966	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Patrick E. Nieburg	1965-1966	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Pleiku
G. Clay Nettles	1965-1967	II Corps, USAID, Lam Dung

Robert B. Oakley	1965-1967	Political Officer, Saigon
Robert W. Garrity	1965-1967	Assistant Press Officer, USIS, Saigon
Howard Frank Needham	1965-1967	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), City Unspecified, Vietnam
Leonard Unger	1965-1967	Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Far East Affairs, Washington, DC
James R. Meenan	1965-1967	Audit Branch, Office of the Comptroller, Saigon
Edward L. Lee II	1965-1968	U.S Marine Corps, Da Nang
David Lambertson	1965-1968	Mekong Delta Reporter, USAID, Saigon
John W. Holmes	1965-1968	Economic Officer, Saigon
James R. Bullington	1965-1966 1966-1967 1967-1968 1968	Provincial Reporter, Hue Aide to Ambassador, Saigon Province Representative, USAID, Quang Tri State Department, Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Richard W. Teare	1965-1967 1967-1969 1969-1971	Political Officer, Saigon INR, South Vietnam Analyst, Washington, DC State Department, Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Stephen J. Ledogar	1965-1969 1966 1966-1967 1967 1967-1968 1968-1969	USAID Representative, Quang Tri Province Interagency Study, Saigon CORDS, Saigon Defense Department, NMCC, Washington, DC State Department, Vietnam Information Office, Washington, DC EAP, Vietnam Desk, Washington, DC
Lindsey Grant	1965-1968 1969-1970	Political Officer, Vietnamese Affairs, New Delhi, India National Security Council, Washington, DC
William Lloyd Stearman	1965-1967	Psychological and Propaganda Operations,

		JUSPAO, Saigon
	1967-1971	Vietnam Task Force, East Asia Bureau, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
James G. Lowenstein	1965-1974	Staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC
	1967-1974	Staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, City Unspecified, Vietnam
Robert B. Petersen	1966-1967	Assistant Public Affairs Officer, USIA, Saigon
David G. Brown	1966-1968	Political Officer, Saigon
Gerard M. Gert	1966-1968	Psychological Operations, Saigon
L. Wade Lathram	1966-1968	Deputy Director, USAID, Saigon
David Rybak	1966-1968	Refugee Officer, USAID, Saigon
Charles H. Twining	1966-1968	Area Development Officer, USAID, Dalat
Theodore J.C. Heavner	1966-1969	Supervising Political Officer, Saigon
John M. Steeves	1966-1969	Director General of the Foreign Service, Washington, DC
Richard W. Duemling	1966-1970	Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary for East Asia, Washington, DC
James F. Mack	1966-1969	CORDS Program, Provincial Reporting Officer, Vietnam
	1969-1971	Intelligence Analyst, Washington, DC
	1972-1973	Paris Peace Accords Monitor, South Vietnam
Thomas P.H. Dunlop	1966-1969	Political Officer, Saigon
	1972-1974	Political Officer, Saigon
Frank N. Burnet	1966-1967	Political Advisor, Commander in Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC), Washington, DC
	1967-1969	Province Advisor, Bien Hoa
	1971-1975	Intelligence Analyst, Southeast Asia, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington,

		DC
Lawrence H. Hydle	1966-1967 1968-1972 1973	Consular Officer, Saigon Political Officer, Saigon Consular Officer, Bien Hoa
Frank Pavich	1966-1972	Program Officer, USAID
Michael E. Tolle	1967	Civilian, Da Nang
Anthony C. Zinni	1967	Second Lieutenant, Marine Divisions, Vietnam
David C. Miller, Jr.	1967-1968	Simulmatics (Business), Saigon
John E. Graves	1967-1968	Provincial Advisor, Rach Gia
Thomas F. Conlon	1967-1968	Head of Provincial Reporting, Saigon
Vernon C. Johnson	1967-1968	Vietnam Bureau, USAID, City Unspecified, Vietnam
Charles L. Daris	1967-1969	Provincial Advisor, USAID, Saigon
Charles T. Cross	1967-1969	Deputy, I Corps, Danang
Timothy Michael Carney	1967-1969	Rotation Officer, Saigon
Larry Colbert	1967-1969 1969-1970	CORDS Refugee Advisor, USAID, Da Nang Vietnam Training Center, Washington, DC
Thomas B. Killeen	1967-1969	Refugee Officer, Da Nang and Hue
Richard R. Wyrrough	1967-1968 1968-1969 1969-1970	Forward Base Commander, US Army, Bien Hoa Vietnam, National Military Academy, Dalat Brigade Commander, Task Force South, South Vietnam
Douglas R. Keene	1967-1970	CORDS Officer, Go Cong Province
Melvin R. Chatman	1967-1970	199 th Infantry Brigade, Vietnam
Thomas Parker, Jr.	1967-1970	Deputy District Senior Advisor, Saigon

Walter L. Cutler	1967-1971	Political Officer, Saigon
Arthur A. Hartman	1967-1972	Staff Officer, Planning and Coordination, Washington, DC
Stephen T. Johnson	1967-1970 1970-1973 1973 1973	Political Officer, Saigon Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC International Control Commission, Saigon Political Officer, Nha Trang
Hugh G. Appling	1967-1968 1973-1974	Provincial Advisor, Tay Ninh Deputy Chief of Mission, Saigon
Joseph C. Walsh	1967-1969	Executive Officer, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), City Unspecified, Vietnam
Roger Kirk	1967-1969 1970-1971	Political Officer, Saigon Vietnamese Affairs, Washington, DC
John Sylvester, Jr.	1967-1968 1968 1969 1970-1972	White House Staff, Washington, DC Political Advisor, Vietnamese Affairs, Chau- doc, Mekong Delta Binh-long Political Officer, Saigon
Francis Terry McNamara	1967-1968 1968-1969 1969-1971 1974-1975 1975	Chief, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Vinh Long Deputy Senior Advisor, Quang Tri Consul General, Da Nang Consul General, Can Tho Refugee Work, Guam and the U.S.
Ellsworth Bunker	1967-1973	Ambassador, Vietnam
Richard T. McCormack	1968	Head of Operations Research, Philco-Ford, Saigon
Charles Lahiguera	1968-1969 1969	CORDS Refugee Officer, Phouc Long Province Refugee Reporting Officer, First Corps, Saigon
Parker W. Borg	1968-1969	Deputy District Advisor, CORDS Vietnam

William Lenderking	1968-1969	Advisor to Vietnamese Information Rep., Pleiku
	1969	Joint US Public Affairs Officer, USIA, Saigon
Edgar J. Gordon	1968-1969	Economic Officer, Saigon
Carl C. Cundiff	1968-1969	Economic Officer, USAID, Saigon
Galen L. Stone	1968-1969	Political Counselor, Saigon
Samuel Vick Smith	1968-1969	Deputy District Advisor, Bien Hoa
Lloyd Jonnes	1968-1969	Counselor for Economic Affairs/Associate Director, USAID, Saigon
William Veale	1969-1969	Captain, U.S. Army, Vietnam
Andrew F. Antippas	1968-1970	Political Officer, Saigon
Stan Ifshin	1968-1970	USAID Officer, Saigon
Stevenson McIlvaine	1968-1970	Province Advisor, Camau
Thomas Macklin, Jr.	1968-1970	Youth Affairs Officer, Saigon
William A. Weingarten	1968-1970	New Life Development Program, My Tho
James J. Gormley	1968-1970	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Da Nang
Eugene Rosenfeld	1968-1970	Chief of Mission, Press Center, Saigon
Charles S. Whitehouse	1968-1970	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Saigon
Lawrence J. Hall	1968-1972	Deputy Director, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Theresa A. Tull	1968-1970	Political Officer, Saigon
	1970-1972	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Frederick Z. Brown	1968-1970	Province Advisor, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Vinh Long
	1971-1973	Consul General, Da Nang

Carl Edward Dillery	1968-1969	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Quang Ngai
James B. Engle	1968-1970	Province Senior Advisor, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Phy Yen
	1970-1973	Director, Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
	1973	Consul General, Nha Trang
Morton I. Abramowitz	1968-1969	Staff Member, Senior Interdepartmental Group, Washington, DC
	1972	Director, East Asia Division, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Washington, DC
	1974-1978	Political Advisor to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command, Washington, DC
Robert S. Zigler	1968-1975	Program Officer, USAID, Saigon
Richard Sackett Thompson	1968-1972	Provincial Reporting Unit, Saigon
	1974-1975	External Affairs, Saigon
Clarke McCurdy Brintnall	1969-1970	Major, U.S. Army, Phouc Vinh
Charles Stuart Kennedy	1969-1970	Consul General, Saigon
Eugene Kopp	1969-1970	Deputy Director, USIA, Washington, DC
Lange Schermerhorn	1969-1970	Consular Officer, Saigon
James W. Chamberlin	1969-1970	Artilleryman, U.S. Army, Vietnam
Lacy A. Wright	1969-1970	Political Officer, Saigon
Frederick (Ted) G. Mason, Jr.	1969-1970	JUSPAO Affairs Officer, Saigon
	1970-1971	CORDS, Saigon
J. Richard Bock	1969-1970	Refugee Officer, Bien Hoa
	1970-1971	Special Assistant, Saigon
William K. Hitchcock	1969-1970	Director, Refugees and War Victims, Saigon
	1970-1972	Political Counselor, Saigon
Bruce W. Clark	1969-1970	Deputy District Advisor, Tuy Hoa

	1970-1971	Office of Inspector General, Foreign Assistance, Washington, DC
	1971-1972	Vietnam Working Group, Washington, DC
Ernestine S. Heck	1969-1971	Political Officer, Saigon
William A. Root	1969-1971	Transport/Communications Officer, Saigon
Ints M. Silins	1969-1970	Vietnamese Language Training, Washington, DC
	1970	District Senior Advisor, Duc Thanh District, Mekong Delta
	1970-1973	Aide to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Saigon
James D. Phillips	1970	Vietnam Inspection Team, Da Nang
Parker W. Borg	1970	Policy Programs and Plans, CORDS, Saigon
David Lazar	1970-1971	Director, CORDS Region I, Da Nang
Dell Pendergrast	1970-1971	Psychological Operations Advisor, Saigon
Maurice E. Lee	1970-1971	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
John M. Reid	1970-1971	Political Officer, JUSPAO, Saigon
Michael W. Cotter	1970-1971	CORDS, Mekong Delta
	1971	Staff Aide, Saigon
Richard A. Virden	1970-1971	Wireless File Correspondent, USIS, Saigon
Natale H. Bellocchi	1970-1971	CORDS, Da Nang
	1971-1972	Commercial Attaché, Saigon
David Winn	1970-1972	CORDS, Long Khanh
John Gunther Dean	1970-1972	Deputy, CORDS, Danang
Michael E. Tolle	1970-1972	Refugee Officer, Saigon
Richard Funkhouser	1970-1972	CORDS, Saigon
Howard H. Lange	1970-1971	Pacification Program, Hue
	1972	Political Officer, Saigon

Harry Haven Kendall	1970-1972	Economic Policy Officer, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Frank E. Schmelzer	1970-1972	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Tuy Hoa
Roy T. Haverkamp	1970-1972	Area Development Advisor, Saigon
Anthony C. Zinni	1970-1974	Company Commander, Marine Divisions, Vietnam
Donald McConville	1970-1974	Economic Officer, AID, Saigon
Arthur Mead	1970-1975	Foreign Agricultural Service, Washington, DC
Melvin R. Chatman	1970-1976	Senior District Advisor, Cuchi and Bien Ho
Robert H. Nooter	1970-1975	Assistant Administrator, USAID, Washington, DC
Charles Higginson	1971	Junior Foreign Service Inspector, Vietnam
Lillian E. Ostermeier	1971	Secretary to Ambassador Bruce, Paris
Douglas Watson	1971-1973	Province Development Officer, Saigon
Robert A. Lincoln	1971-1973	Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon
Irwin Pernick	1971-1973	Office of Political Military Affairs, Washington, DC
Michael G. Wygant	1971-1973	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), Pleiku
Gary L. Matthews	1971-1973	CORDS, Da Nang
John A. Bushnell	1971-1974	Program Analysis, NSC, The White House, Washington, DC
David Lambertson	1971-1973 1973-1975	Spokesman, Paris EAB, Regional Affairs, Washington, DC
J. Richard Bock	1973	TDY, Bien Hoa

Michael W. Cotter	1973	Vice Consul, Can Tho
Douglas R. Keene	1973	Temporary Duty from Warsaw, Saigon
Richard W. Teare	1973	Deputy Principal Officer, Nha Trang
Samuel B. Thomsen	1973 1973-1974	Principal Officer, Saigon Liaison, Joint Military Commission, Hue
Marshall Bremet	1973-1974	Public Affairs Officer, Saigon
John N. Irwin, II	1973-1974	Ambassador to France, Paris Peace Talks, France
Hugh Burleson	1973-1975	Program Officer, USIS, Saigon
Theresa A. Tull	1973-1975	Deputy Principal Officer, Da Nang
Fred Charles Thomas, Jr.	1973-1975	ICCS Liaison Office, Saigon
Charles Lahiguera	1973-1975	Peace Accord Monitor, Third Corps, Bien Hoa
James R. Bullington	1973-1975	Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Wolfgang J. Lehmann	1973-1974 1974-1975	Consul General, Can Tho Deputy Chief of Mission, Saigon
Moncrieff J. Spear	1973-1975	Consul General, Nha Trang
Frank G. Wisner	1973 197?-1976	Deputy Consul General, Can Tho Vietnam Task Force, Washington, DC
Parker W. Borg	1974	Member of Peace Agreement Monitor Team, Pleiku
Francis J. Tatu	1974	Principal Officer, Chiang Mai
David Michael Adamson	1974-1975	Rotational Officer, Nha Trang
Robert A. Martin	1974-1975	Political Officer, Nha Trang, Saigon
Lacy A. Wright	1973-1974 1974-1975	Acting Consul General, Chun Tien Province Political Officer, Saigon

Richard E. Thompson	1974-1977	Diplomatic Courier, Bangkok
Charles Lahiguera	1975	Refugee Evacuation Officer, SS Blue Ridge
Parker W. Borg	1975	Assistant to Assistant Secretary Habib, Washington
Robert V. Keeley	1975-1976	Deputy Director, Task Force for Vietnam Refugees, Washington, DC
John Hogan	1976-1977	I Corps, Da Nang
Edmund McWilliams	1978-1980	Desk Officer for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, Washington, DC
Stephen T. Johnson	1984-1986	State Department, Vietnam Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Charles H. Twining	1988-1991	Office Director; Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, Washington
Marie Therese Huhtala	1990-1992	Office director, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, Washington, DC
G. Eugene Martin	1992-1996	Consul General, Guangzhou
Marie Therese Huhtala	1996-1998	Deputy Director, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand & Vietnam Affairs, Washington, DC
Thomas R. Carmichael	2001-2002	Vietnamese Language Training, FSI, Washington, DC
	2002-2004	Public Affairs Officer, Hanoi

MERRITT N. COOTES
Temporary Consul
Saigon (1936)

Merritt N. Cootes was born in Virginia in 1909. Educated in France, Austria and Princeton, he joined the Foreign Service in 1931 and served in Haiti, Hong Kong, Italy, Portugal, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, Algeria, and Washington, DC. He retired in 1969. He was interviewed by Lillian Mullins in 1991-1993.

COOTES: I was just about to go back to Hong Kong when a cable came in on January 1, 1936. I

said to Henry, "Oh, you can decode this thing tomorrow. Don't bother about it today." Henry said, "No, I think we'd better go down there right now." It's a good thing that we did, because the telegram covered my transfer to Saigon, to fill in for the Consul, Quincy Roberts, who had not been back to the U.S. for 17 years! In those days, if you took home leave, you paid your own way back to the U.S. and then to your post. Roberts decided that, rather than pay his way home from his previous posts in Fiji or Indonesia, he'd stay where he was. So he hadn't been home for 17 years. He wrote to the Department and asked that somebody be assigned to replace him. He received no answer and, three months later, he sent a telegram. That was unheard of in those days. So the answer was a telegram to me in Manila, ordering me to Saigon to take over while the Consul went on home leave. Finally, his home leave was paid, as a special consideration. So I spent seven months in Saigon. It was a one-man post. There were such posts in those days -- they don't any more, as we all know.

Of course, when I arrived in Saigon on January 6, 1936, I thought that I would have to do all of the end of the year economic reporting. I thought that this was going to be a terrible burden. I knew nothing about Indochina -- I barely knew where it was. But when I was met at the dock by Consul Quincy Roberts, he said, "Look, I've got all of my reports lined up. I didn't realize that I was going to get to go on leave so quickly. I've got all of that done. I'd suggest that you go up to Hanoi, because that's where the Governor General lives. You can establish contact with the office of the Governor General and the Customs, Police, and all of the rest of the officials. So if anything happens while you're down in Saigon, you will have your contacts up at headquarters in Hanoi." At that time Indochina effectively belonged to the French. Cochin China [now southern Vietnam] actually belonged to France, by treaty. Annam [now central Vietnam], Cambodia, and Tonkin [now northern Vietnam] were French protectorates. For some reason the capital was established in Hanoi, rather than Saigon, although Cochin China was the wealthy part of Indochina, where the rice exports were produced. So I stayed there for seven months...

Q: *In Saigon?*

COOTES: In Saigon.

Q: *How did you get to Hanoi -- by train?*

COOTES: By ship from the Philippines, from Manila. I went from Manila to Saigon, and then, when I returned to Hong Kong, it was by ship from Saigon to Hong Kong.

Q: *I just wondered how you got to Hanoi from Saigon.*

COOTES: I went part of the way by train, but the railroad had not been completed. So after traveling by train some distance we all got off and onto buses and traveled something like two hours by bus to Nha Trang. From Nha Trang we took the train to Hue and so up to Hanoi.

Q: *I see.*

COOTES: When I was in Hanoi, I met the Frenchman who was the agent for Chrysler cars. He said that he had just taken delivery on some automobiles which he had to drive down to Saigon.

Since I was going back to Saigon, would I drive one of the cars for him? So I drove a car, and it was very interesting. We went through the "pays des insoumis," in the hills of Indochina. It was called "insoumi" because the French had really never done more than occupy the towns. At night it was not safe to walk around. The so-called "natives" had never really been subjugated by the French. So I drove back to Saigon with the Chrysler agent. He was delighted to have someone to drive the car for him.

Q: *There were roads?*

COOTES: Oh, yes, quite decent roads. The French have always been good at that in all of their colonies, as I found out later on when I was in Algeria. What the French had done in that area in terms of transportation and communications was literally fabulous.

Q: *So you were back in Saigon for another few months.*

COOTES: I was back in Saigon for another few months. Quincy Roberts came back from home leave, and I returned to my post in Hong Kong. As I said, your transportation on home leave was not paid by the Department. I was entitled to some leave, after three years. My father was a great friend of one of the personnel people who served under Mr. Byington. He arranged to have me transferred from Hong Kong to Montreal, with instructions to proceed via Washington.

KINGSLEY W. HAMILTON
Consular Officer
Saigon (1940-1942)

Kingsley W. Hamilton was born in 1911 to Presbyterian missionaries in the Philippines. He attended high school in China, the Philippines and Ohio. He graduated from the College of Wooster in 1933. One of his favorite history professors topics on world history influenced his interest in international affairs. This led him to graduate work at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and his taking the Foreign Service Exam. He has also served in Hungary and Switzerland. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on December 9, 1994.

Q: *Then where were you assigned?*

HAMILTON: Saigon.

Q: *You were there from '40 to '42. How did you get to Saigon?*

HAMILTON: Well, by train to Genoa, and got on an Italian liner, the Conte Biancamano, and then to Singapore. We had the Italian minister of colonies aboard, he was on an inspection trip to their then colony Eritrea, on the Red Sea.

Q: *Italian Somalia?*

HAMILTON: Massawa was the port where we stopped and Asmara was the capital of the area.

Q: *That would have been Ethiopia, or Eritrea. The Italians had all of Ethiopia at that time.*

HAMILTON: Yes Eritrea. Then we went on making stops at Aden, Bombay, and Ceylon; so it took a while, a pleasant cruise. At Singapore I got off, and then waited a week until I could get a small French ship to Saigon.

Q: *So you were in Saigon February '40. What was your job?*

HAMILTON: There were two of us. The consul at first was Peter Flood, I was the vice consul. We did everything. The Cochinchina government operated fairly independently. The Governor General was in Hanoi, but we were responsible for the reporting and other actions as a legation or an embassy would have been. We communicated directly with the Department but sent copies of some things to Paris while the embassy was still there.

Q: *What was the situation in Saigon like in early 1940?*

HAMILTON: It was a pleasant and interesting situation, except that we felt cut off. It was all right up until May 1940 when Paris fell. There was regular steamship travel; a ship called once a week or every ten days en route from France to China and Japan and back. Other ships also called. People weren't worried particularly about anything. So life was good; a few shortages but quite pleasant calm. Then, after the German armistice in June, the French really felt cut off, left high and dry. Admiral Decoux, a Vichy sympathizer, became Governor General and General Catreux left and joined the Free French

Admiral Decoux was given a large measure of authority and was also appointed High Commissioner for all French possessions in the Pacific. He had authority but meager resources, physical contact with France having essentially ceased. Supplies began to be short, so he had to try to develop increased commercial relations with the Philippines and Hong Kong particularly.

Within a month after the fall of France the Japanese began moving into Tonkin, the northern part of Indochina, in various ways, first with inspectors on the railway running to Yunnanfu in China. There were military clashes in September 1940 at Caobang and Lang Son on the Indochina-Chinese border.

Then the Japanese began making economic demands. They wanted all the rubber and much of the rice, and other things. They promised to pay, but actually all they did was to give vouchers. Generally they needed all their own supplies for themselves and sent little to Indochina.

By the beginning of '41 gasoline was running short. The French began mixing some rice alcohol in with it, and developed what they called gazogenes, an engine able to run on charcoal gas used first in buses and then some cars. Other things began to be scarce, including new movies. Life was more somber than it had been, with fewer balls and parties.

Q: From your observation, how was the French Colonial world? Were Vietnamese integrated into the colonial structure, or were you dealing with the French?

HAMILTON: We dealt with the French almost exclusively. Even in the provinces the top man was always French. Outside of Saigon the French themselves, however, mingled more with the native people than the British tended to do in their colonies. The French also seemed to marry natives more often than the British did. But the French had their schools, their lycee system. There was a university at Hanoi, but the French usually went to universities in France.

A certain amount of unrest developed among the Vietnamese towards the end of 1940. It got rather serious. I don't know who was behind it. There was considerable feeling that the Japanese were. French officials referred to "communist" disturbances. The French arrested a large number of people and put many of them on an island off the coast, Poulo Condore, where they had a penal colony.

Q: Like Devil's Island.

HAMILTON. Yes. Poulo Condore is about 90 miles east of the southern end of Indochina.

Q: Were Vietnamese coming to you as an American representative to let you know how much they resented the French? Were they using this, or were we pretty much a neutral?

HAMILTON: We were pretty neutral. The Vietnamese hardly ever showed up at the consulate, or elsewhere. We had a few Chinese who would come over and whom we knew fairly well -- businessmen, or commercial folks, rice dealers, or something of that sort. But it was rare when a Vietnamese came into the consulate.

Q: What was the major work you were doing then?

HAMILTON: Well, there was no visa work and practically no passport work. Most of the time it was political and economic reporting. There was quite a bit of economic reporting because Indochina was a rich country with a lot of production and export of rice, rubber, metals, and various things of that sort. A lot of political reporting was necessary at that time. It got so heavy and we were so far from Hanoi, the capital, that the Department sent down Charles Reed from Shanghai primarily to do political reporting in Hanoi. He got a room or two, opened a little office in a hotel, and took over much of the political reporting. Normal consular matters he would usually refer to us in Saigon. People visited him but he did not really operate an office for the public, particularly not for consular services.

Q: When you say political reporting, was this basically about what the Japanese were up to more than anything else?

HAMILTON: Yes, plus the policies and attitudes of the French and problems with Thailand.

Q: What was your attitude, and others with you in the consulate there, towards the French, after

the fall of France? The British during 1940 were going through the Battle of Britain and it was a very difficult time, and the Vichy French and the British went in and attacked the French navy in Algeria and in Dakar. I'm not talking about our attitude. I'm talking about your attitude and people around you towards the regime in Saigon at that time as this news came out.

HAMILTON: Personally we were naturally pro-British and Free French. The local government people, of course, could only present one front but not always with much enthusiasm. It was pro-Vichy, and Petain still had the respect of a good many people, even though it turned out he couldn't do much. On the other hand, there was also quite an anti-British feeling. Many felt that the British had let them down. Then there were plenty of the French looking to the U.S., and many were friendly towards it. Others just wanted to wait and see...they were completely taken aback about what had happened, and didn't feel up to much of anything. They were worried about the Japanese coming into the north. Initially they didn't think this would cause problems in the south.

Q: How did that play out?

HAMILTON: Well, the Japanese did come down. From behind the scenes, they had good control of things up north by September 1940, and then gradually worked down to the south. They had control there by August of '41, and began landing troops.

An AP correspondent, Relman Morin, tried to trail around the country to find out where all these Japanese soldiers and equipment were going. You could see that they had largely taken over the Saigon airport. This was the only place in the Saigon area where they constructed barracks and kept troops and planes. They also built or improved airfields and barracks in other parts of Cochinchina and Cambodia, took over other buildings and some homes by working through the French, erected small radio stations, and strung telephone and telegraph lines widely.

In November, the Japanese began following us to see where we were going. You'd see them not far behind when you moved about Saigon or out into the countryside.

Q: Was it still technically French government there?

HAMILTON: Oh, yes.

Q: Were the Japanese calling the shots?

HAMILTON: To a very large extent, yes. When they wanted something they got it. They asked for it, and the French pretty much obliged. Various economic and other agreements were the front for things the Japanese wanted. There was little else the French could do if they wanted to maintain at least nominal control. No help was available from France.

The French were never heavily armed in Indochina. Some 40,000 native troops and workmen had been sent to France after the outbreak of war in Europe, and by the time the Japanese moved into southern Indochina their forces exceeded the French.

Q: What was the general feeling? Why were the Japanese there? Why were they putting troops in?

HAMILTON: Well, that was the question. There was some speculation that they had in mind Malaya, now Malaysia, but nobody knew and that really didn't seem likely. Although things were pointing in that direction, people couldn't believe it. In fact, however, that was what it proved to be all about.

Q: Did we have military attachés down there?

HAMILTON: No. The nearest military attaché was in Bangkok. He came over once, I don't remember just when, for a few days, probably shortly after the fall of France.

Q: This would be June of 1940.

HAMILTON: I think it was soon after. All I remember is that he came for a brief visit. He may have gone on to Hanoi, I'm not sure about that either.

Q: This is before Japan went to war with us, any problems with our operation, outside of being followed a little?

HAMILTON: On the whole, no. On Sunday evening, November 23, 1941, however, the Japanese gendarmerie, which was a military police organization, put a bomb against the door of the consulate (which was in an office/apartment building) and blew the consulate apart.

I had an apartment across a little park, about a block away, so I heard the noise. Our American clerk, who lived a floor or two above was badly scared and shaken up. I went over and saw the office was essentially demolished. A lot of smoke and dust were pouring out the door.

In the morning we got in touch with the French who knew all about it by that time. We were able to get some space in the Bank of Indochina on its top floor. We operated there from November 24th to December 8th, when the Japanese took us into custody and stopped all our operations.

Q: Were the Japanese seen to do this? I mean was this blatant, or was this supposedly done by Vietnamese terrorists? How did this bomb...

HAMILTON: I know of no witnesses. The French looked into it and told Sidney Browne, the consul, what we all thought, that it was the Japanese gendarmerie who had done it. I don't know how firm the evidence was. We never had any evidence, I don't believe, of any animus among the natives toward us. We thought it quite unlikely that any of them who were operating against the French would have done it. Why the Japanese would have, is hard to say too. It might have tipped their hand. I do not recall that the Department responded to our reports, but it must have even though it would have been very busy.

Q: Yes, by the time it was absorbed the balloon had gone up. In that part of the world it was December 8th when the Pearl Harbor attack came. What happened with you all?

HAMILTON: I guess it was about 2:30 in the morning in Saigon that low flying planes awakened me, and soon a Japanese squad (a lieutenant, an interpreter, and several men with fixed bayonets) pounded on my apartment door, and said, "Open up." When I opened up they handed me a mimeographed statement from the Headquarters of the Nippon Army that said we were at war and that I had to stay there until further word.

They did the same with Sidney Browne and the British, although they missed one of the British vice consuls. We were all kept in our quarters until arrangements were made.

The British owned a large residence for their Consul General. The U.S. didn't own any property, and I don't know just how it was arranged that we would all be put into the British residence. But after three or four days later we were moved over there, with our servants and a radio. The AP correspondent, Relman Morin, was also brought in, as well as the head of the British and American Tobacco Company office.

Q: What did you do? What were you up to?

HAMILTON: We weren't up to anything. The British Consul General and Sidney Browne negotiated a little bit with the Japanese who said they would put a couple of guards in the front of the house, and they would not go into the rest of the house at all. So our guards sat there in a small room and we organized ways of passing the time; some reading, some writing, listening to the news which wasn't very encouraging, and often bridge in the evening (which is how I learned to play the game).

Q: The first six months particularly.

HAMILTON: One bad military situation after another. But the servants were allowed to go out marketing every day, so we had a good food supply. They could also do the laundry regularly. There were shortages, of course, which affected everyone.

The residence had a fairly large grounds so we could get out and exercise every day. We made a deck tennis court and a miniature golf course.

It was somewhat monotonous, but not too bad a life. You had no responsibilities, nothing you had to do. The AP man, of course, was accustomed to being on the go all the time; so found it very restricting. The rest of us didn't find it quite so bad in that respect. We got along all right together for the most part.

Q: How big was the Consulate General, or was it a Consulate?

HAMILTON: For the British it was a Consulate General.

Q: For us it was a Consulate. How big was the American staff?

HAMILTON: Americans, just the two of us (officers) and an American clerk.

Q: So the two of you and the American clerk was a woman. She was also interned too?

HAMILTON: No, she wasn't. She had to check into the police once a week, but stayed in her apartment. I don't know that it was particularly agreeable, especially going out. People couldn't be too friendly with her. But anyhow, she was on her own. The whole staff of the Consulate was still very small. We had a French clerk, a lady, who kept the accounts, and acted as an administrative officer; an Indian clerk who helped handle the mail room, helped gather data for some reports, and a few other things; a janitor/messenger. That was it.

Q: How did this play out? You could hear the news, they didn't take your radio away.

HAMILTON: No, we always had a radio. In fact we had a couple. Well, the Swiss consul was finally put in charge of American interests and became the contact between the Department, the Japanese, and ourselves. I don't know just when that occurred, but it was a while before he was able to get over to see us. Even then what he could say was restricted since the Japanese listened in. He was the outside contact and if we needed money or anything else, we had to get it through him. He could arrange for us to go to a dentist, or a doctor if necessary, accompanied by a guard, which we had to do a few times. All the information regarding the exchange arrangement that came along ultimately, came through him.

Q: But how did it play out? I mean, how did they get you out? How did you leave?

HAMILTON: Well, the Japanese finally started two exchange ships, the Asama Maru in Yokohama and the Conte Verde in Shanghai. Passengers were mainly diplomatic personnel, but also many missionaries and some newspaper correspondents. The Asama Maru stopped at Hong Kong before reaching Saigon on July 3rd when we were put aboard. On July 4th we went back down the Saigon River to Cap St. Jacques where those who had been brought over from the Bangkok Legation also boarded. We then went on to Singapore to meet the Conte Verde with its passengers.

Q: This would be 1942.

HAMILTON: Yes. We couldn't go ashore and didn't dock in Singapore, but anchored out in the harbor for a day or two, on one of which the Japanese gave a military air display. From Singapore the ship was all lit up and marked. We were routed south through the Sunda Straits, and across the Indian Ocean into Lourenco Marques in Portuguese East Africa, or Mozambique, on July 23rd. We were saluted by sirens, streams of water and cheers from the many ships in the harbor.

The Japanese diplomats from the U.S. had arrived on the Gripsholm the day before and the exchange was made the following day. They left fairly promptly but it was about a week before the Gripsholm was ready to start back. Then it was still a long way around Cape Horn, over to Rio, and then up to New York, staying out of regular shipping lanes as much as possible. We finally sailed into New York harbor past the Statue of Liberty on August 25th.

Q: What did they do with you? Here you were obviously waiting for another assignment, but we were well into the war by this time. What happened?

HAMILTON: Well, when I got back here I resigned from the Department and found that although I was hardly an expert on Indochina, most people in Washington were less so. So I started spending half my week on Indochina with what was first the Board of Economic Warfare and then the Foreign Economic Administration, and the other half working also on Indochina in the Pentagon with G-2. Sometime in '44, I went back to the Department as desk officer for the Dominions except Canada in the Division of British Commonwealth Affairs. Soon after the UN conference in San Francisco in 1945 I became an assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs and later moved on to President Truman's Point-4 Program.

Q: I think with people who were fired when Stassen came in, the term was they were Stassenated. This interview covers the time particularly I wanted to pick up about Saigon which I found very, very interesting. I served in Saigon much later in '69-'70, and it was quite a different ball game. This was to give you an idea. I was Consul General in Saigon and I ranked just in the upper half of the diplomatic list. I don't think I talked to the ambassador more than once or twice. It was a huge embassy.

HAMILTON: The only other thing I mentioned in that letter I wrote you was fighting between Thailand and Indochina.

As indicated earlier today, the Japanese had established their control of Tonkin by September 1940. In November, military skirmishing broke out between Thai and French frontier forces on the Cambodian border, soon reaching the scale of undeclared war. The apparent immediate source of the situation was a Thai demand, which the French refused, for an adjustment of the frontier, particularly with regard to some islands in the Mekong River. Many people saw a connection between this development and the arrival of the Japanese in Indochina.

Any remaining French reserves were called up and put on the fighting line. At least in southern Indochina, the principal cities were blacked out at night and there was some air activity. Civilians were evacuated from some border towns and the inhabitants of the picturesque Burmese precious stone mining village of Pailin, just within Cambodia, abandoned their homes to return to Burma. It was still deserted when I visited the area in March 1941.

After about two months of relatively heavy military activity between the French and Thai forces in which the Thais were gaining, the Japanese Government offered to mediate. They called a conference aboard a Japanese cruiser at Saigon where an armistice was signed on January 28, 1941.

Under the final peace agreement signed in Tokyo on March 11, 1941 the French ceded to Thailand about one-tenth of the total area of Indochina. This was mostly in Cambodia, and included its richest province of Battambang but excluded the ancient Angkor ruins. I believe Thailand had to give up this territory at the end of World War II.

It was in the midst of the hostilities with Thailand that the internal native disturbances that I

mentioned earlier occurred in parts of Cochinchina and to some extent in Tonkin. Their rather severe suppression and sending some of those rounded up to the Poulo Condore penal colony undoubtedly had a correspondingly unfortunate attitude and temper of many Vietnamese.

Q: I think you're adding some interesting areas that aren't covered; the Thais fighting essentially the French to take over part of Indochina, and also what happened to our Consulate in Saigon. Just to be clear, up in Hanoi, we had a Consulate General up there.

HAMILTON: Well, all we had was the political officer, Charles S. Reed, who was sent down from Shanghai, plus an American clerk, Iris Johnston. I don't think the British had anybody up there. The Japanese moved Mr. Reed around a good deal under harsher conditions than ours in Saigon. Then on June 18 he was brought to join us.

Mr. Reed had not really operated an office for the public. He was there to report and have direct contact with Admiral Decoux's office. This caused some problems for Miss Johnston. She was at liberty until January 29, 1942, but then the Japanese held her in solitary custody for two months during which she was severely questioned in an apparent effort to learn about Mr. Reed's sources of information. She was then allowed to go to the mountain resort of Da Lat in Annam because of her health, and was brought to join the rest of us in Saigon a few days before the Asama Maru's departure.

1. Outbreak of the War:

The Department has been informed of developments through December 6, 1941. On the morning of December 7 the Japanese military authorities completely closed off the Saigon airport which had hitherto been partially accessible to the public. By the same afternoon very few Japanese vessels were left in port. Between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. December 8 a large formation of Japanese planes flew over the city. Later that morning the inhabitants of the city awoke to find notices posted in French, Chinese, and Annamite indicating that war had broken out between Japan and the United States.

2. Treatment of Consular Officers:

All consular officers, with the exception of a British Vice Consul, were roused from their beds and placed under custody by the Japanese military authorities about 3:00 a.m. December 8. In Saigon they were presented a mimeographed sheet giving the reasons for this action and outlining the conditions of the treatment to be expected. The American Consul had some slight contact with two French policemen stationed before his residence, but was soon cautioned not to speak to them. The American Vice Consul never saw any French official. The acting British Consul General was able to deal through a French liaison officer for about a day. When one of the British Vice Consuls reported to the acting Consul General at his residence about 9:00 a.m. December 8, he was taken into custody.

American consular officers were taken to the temporary quarters of the Consulate for a few minutes on the morning of December 8 while the office was given a preliminary search, their living quarters having been previously searched.

The two American consular officers in Saigon were held in their respective residences until December 11 when they were removed to the British consular residence. Here they remained quite comfortably until July 3, 1942 when they boarded the M.S. ASAMA MARU.

The American Consul in Hanoi was held for a time alone in a room of a building not far from the Hotel Metropole where he had resided. Later he was moved to a house furnished for him by the French Government General but where he was still under Japanese guard. Still later he was removed to the premises of the Standard Vacuum Oil Company in Haiphong; from there to a Japanese military camp on the outskirts of Haiphong; and from there to a private house in Haiphong. He received much harsher treatment than the officers in Saigon. Much of the time he was alone; the rest of the time the British Reuters correspondent was with him. On June 18, 1942 he was also transferred to the British consular residence in Saigon.

The British consular officer in Haiphong was at first confined with his family above the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, but was soon removed to a small private house where he has remained with other British subjects in Haiphong. The men have been obliged to remain within the premises, but the women have been free to go into the city during the day. The French wife of one of the men actually boards with her family.

3. Treatment of American Consular Personnel Other Than Officers.

In Saigon American clerk Miss Carolyn C. Jacobs was not molested. She lived normally in her apartment and reported once weekly to the French police.

In Hanoi American Clerk Miss Iris Johnston was at liberty until January 29. She was then held in solitary custody for about two months when she was allowed to proceed to the hill station of Da Lat in southern Annam for reasons of health. She was subjected to severe questioning apparently with the primary object of obtaining information regarding the sources of information used by Consul Charles S. Reed II.

Other employees of the Consulate in Saigon have not been hampered in their movements. French Clerk Mme. Petra has been re-employed by the Swiss Consul, but other employees are finding it difficult to obtain new positions.

4. Treatment of Other American and British Nationals:

With the following exceptions American and British nationals in Southern Indochina have been at liberty and obliged merely to report to the French police once weekly. They have had to abandon commercial activity but have been able to carry on missionary work.

The exceptions are: (1) The American correspondent of the Associated Press was taken into custody on December 12 and brought to the British consular residence on December 13 to remain until July 3; (2) The British manager of the French Manufactures Indochinoises des Cigarettes, an employee of the British and American Tobacco Company, was held with the American Consul from the first; (3) All officers of the British banks in Saigon were held from

December 8 to December 31; (4) The Canadian representative of the Singer Sewing Machine Company was held in jail under harsh treatment for 59 days from January 29; (5) A British accountant of the Standard Vacuum Oil Company was similarly held for about 68 days; (6) A British employee of the firm until recently known as Dreyfus and Cie. was similarly held; (7) A Filipino no longer entitled to the protection of the United States while abroad was held for a month and then turned over to the French on a charge of illegal possession of firearms. The object of the treatment given the three British subjects, as well as one Dutch subject not mentioned above, was to obtain information regarding the affairs of their firms and to break their spirit so that they would consent to work for the Japanese as one or two are now reported to be doing.

In northern Indochina the treatment given American and British nationals differed only in the fact that men have not been at liberty at all while women have been able to go shopping, et cetera during the day. A naturalized Philippine citizen of Swiss-American origin by the name of Corvissiano was picked up by the Japanese on January 29 and apparently held in much the same manner as those taken into custody in southern Indochina at that time. The British Reuters correspondent has been held from the first, part of the time alone, part of the time with the American Consul, and latterly with the other British in Haiphong.

5. Treatment of Chinese:

The Chinese Consul at Saigon, who had remained closely sheltered in a villa at the hill station of Da Lat for some time prior to the outbreak of war, is reported so far to have eluded the Japanese together with his subordinate officers. However, it is not positively known whether he managed to escape the country and, accordingly, the Japanese are holding three of the local clerks in jail until they give information regarding the consul's whereabouts. The treatment given these men is so severe that it is not believed they can long survive.

Other Chinese in Cholon (Saigon) are also harshly treated. They are picked up indiscriminately, imprisoned, and tortured until they consent to report weekly on anti-Japanese activities.

6. Treatment of Consular Establishments:

The American Consul in Saigon refused to open the consular safes, but on December 12 or 13 the Japanese Gendarmerie delivered to the consular officers their personal belongings which had been in the safes. Evidently the safes were forced open and the Japanese obtained the Brown and Grey codes, readings and copies of all telegrams, blank passports, and all confidential matter.

The Japanese always pretended to know nothing of any other regular office of the Consulate. Accordingly, the only other archives which they seem to have obtained were the current files. All other archives and most of the furniture were still in the office damaged by the bomb explosion on November 23. The Consulate's French clerk, Mme. Paulette Petra, managed to remove these to her home in the first day or two following the outbreak of war and is believed still to have them in her possession.

The Japanese also obtained consular files in Hanoi. The safe has been returned to the Swiss

consular agent in Haiphong, but is believed to have been previously opened.

The British Consulate General in Saigon was taken over by the Japanese naval rather than military authorities. British officers have never been taken back to the office and do not know what action has been taken with regard to it. Since the British Vice Consul in Haiphong is an employee of the Chartered Bank, it is presumed that any documents he had were taken over with those of the bank.

7. Political and Military Developments:

A further Franco-Japanese agreement was signed on December 9, 1941, but its contents are not known. Somewhat later the Vichy Government appointed Governor General Jean Decoux as High Commissioner for all French possessions in the Pacific.

It is reliably reported that the French cruiser Lamotte Picquet has remained continually in French waters. The sloop Amiral Charner has probably so remained. Nothing is known regarding the movements of the single French submarine which was in Indochina and under repair on December 8 except that it has been repaired and was in Saigon on July 3.

It is reliably reported that much of the Japanese air offensive against the Allies in the early weeks of the Pacific war was directed from Indochina. The planes which bombed Manila are understood to have left from Nha Trang just north of Camranh Bay in Annam and those which bombed Singapore from Baclieu and Soctrang just south of the mouth of the Mekong in Cochinchina. In the early days of the war damaged planes were frequently seen to return to these points, often to crash before landing.

Most of the active planes have now left the Saigon area for unknown destinations, but there is every reason to believe that Saigon itself is being used as a repair base not only for planes but also for trucks and other mechanized equipment. It is definitely known, for instance, that the foundry belonging to the French firm of Faci (Forges, Ateliers, Chartiers Indochinois) and located about 300 yards up the Arroyo Chinois from the Saigon River is straightening propeller blades for the Japanese.

The Japanese have completed the 60 kilometers of railway between Mongkol Borey in the province of Battambang, formerly in Cambodia, and the Thai city of Muong Aran Pradhet thus linking Phnom Penh with Singapore by rail. They are now reported to be bringing their supplies and troops down the Chinese coast by vessel and through the channel between Hainan Island and the mainland to Haiphong. From Haiphong transportation is by rail to Saigon, by truck from Saigon to Phnom Penh, and by rail from Phnom Penh to points beyond in Thailand or Malaya. Thus the hazardous voyage down the Indochinese coast and across the Gulf of Siam is avoided.

It is probably because of this increased traffic that express shipments have been suspended on the Saigon-Hanoi-Haiphong railroad. The extra wear on equipment which cannot be replaced is also probably responsible for the increased number of wrecks which are occurring on the Indochinese railways.

It was reported on July 3 that the Japanese plan to move most of their troops from Indochina to other fronts, leaving only a police force of about 6,000 men. This would ameliorate conditions for the French considerably, but would not necessarily affect the transit of supplies through Indochina. Accordingly, the railway, which is extremely vulnerable at several points, particularly where it runs with the highway, would remain a worthwhile bombing objective. (1)

A Canadian artillery unit of about 1,000 men from Singapore, as well as Australian and Indian troops, has been in Saigon for some time as prisoners of war. The men are employed on the docks, in general throughout the port area, and at the airport. Their quarters except those of the Indians are in the port area about 200 yards from the river. Six have died; two have tried to escape -- with what results is not known. Their food is believed to be poor. A considerable group outside is working secretly to ameliorate their conditions. In this the Annamites took the initiative under the leadership of Dr. and Mrs. Tranh van Doc, 16 Boulevard de la Somme, Saigon, but there are also French working through several men in the Surete and Mme. Gaillard, the Vogue Dress Shop, Rue Catinat, Saigon. The Indians are quartered at Nhabe on the Soirap River 15 kilometers south of Saigon.

Practically all French merchant shipping has been taken over by the Japanese and now flies the Japanese flag. Most of the vessels have left Saigon and some are reported to have been damaged already. Efforts are being made by the Government General to locate the 850 men from their crews in shore positions in Indochina.

Allied submarines appear to be effective off the Indochinese coast, for the French now consider Saigon a dangerous port from which to sail.

The Allied bombings of the Hanoi airport are reported to have done considerable damage in spite of the offhand manner in which they were treated by the French press. At least one American pilot by the name of Bishop from California is now interned at Saigon.

Japanese participation in the administrative affairs of Indochina has increased since the beginning of the war. They censor the postal and telegraph services, using a French stamp, and listen to telephone conversations. On one occasion they even arrested the Director of Posts and Telegraphs and held him a few hours because one of his subordinates had interfered with one of their own telegraph lines. Later the director was replaced.

The Japanese seem particularly anxious to take over the administration of justice. To prevent their having any excuse for doing so the French are becoming increasingly severe in law enforcement, generally convicting and inflicting heavy penalties, particularly on Europeans.

There is good reason to believe that the Japanese are compiling evidence for a "White Book" or some such document to be issued in justification of their action when they are ready openly to take over the administration of Indochina. The basis of this book is apparently to be an exposure of French morals; for, in the questioning to which they have subjected many persons this has been one of the principal points on which they have endeavored to obtain statements.

It also appears that the Japanese may be trying to gain influence with certain sections of the

population by selling them drugs in much the same manner they adopted in North China. The French opium monopoly is short of opium and the Japanese have brought some heroin and cocaine into the country. The French are reported to have increased the area devoted to poppy cultivation in Laos, but the crop is not yet ready. In this connection it is also reliably reported that opium smoking has increased greatly in Hanoi since the outbreak of war, particularly among the women who have lost hope of returning to France.

8. Economic Developments

Economic conditions in French Indochina have steadily deteriorated since December 8, 1941. Business activity is negligible. Supplies of all imported products are extremely low or have already been exhausted. What remains is generally strictly rationed. Wheat flour was exhausted within a few weeks after the outbreak of war; butter and margarine can no longer be purchased except occasionally on the black market; potatoes are a rarity; medical supplies are very low; wines are exhausted and liquors practically so; chemicals for the manufacture of matches are deficient; lubricating oils have to be cleaned and re-cleaned because fresh oil is lacking; iron and steel for construction purposes can scarcely be had; and machinery is not obtainable. Even supplies of some domestic products such as fruit, charcoal, fish, and vegetables are inadequate, primarily because they are bought up by the Japanese. Milk supplies are exceedingly low. What canned milk remains is reserved solely for infants and the sick. All fresh milk in the Saigon area is now being pasteurized for the same purposes, but it is doubtful whether it will be adequate for the need.

Although the Government General endeavors to prevent profiteering and to control prices, it does not try to maintain prices at any given point. Accordingly, both prices and the cost of living have greatly increased since December 8, 1941.

The Government General has also intensified its efforts, begun some time ago, to encourage the development of substitutes for deficient commodities. Thus, a relatively satisfactory flour is now made from a mixture of 70 percent rice and 30 percent maize flour. The production of oil from peanuts, castor beans, coconuts, fish, and millions of rats caught in the rice fields has greatly increased and is used for illumination, other household purposes, and industrial fuel. Soya bean milk, certain toilet articles such as powder, and food side-lines such as jams and jellies and some alcoholic beverages are also being produced. The production of industrial alcohol, principally from rice, for motor fuel has been further increased, but it is now being mixed with 10 percent water according to the Swiss Consul in Saigon. This has probably become necessary because the Japanese are known to be using alcohol and charcoal in some of their trucks.

The Government General has also established an agricultural credit society organized on a sectional basis to foster the production of various crops in different regions throughout the country, to lend money for this purpose, and to purchase the resulting output.

Even fewer supplies than before the war are arriving from Japan, although the higher prices keep goods in the stores longer. Some shipments reported to have left Japan have never arrived, and one cargo of milk is said definitely to have been sunk.

The 1941-1942 rice crop is reported to have been good and the maize crop poor. Further details are not available, but a good rice crop is one which would provide about 1.5 million tons for export after domestic consumption had been provided for in all the territory formerly belonging to Indochina. Without the Cambodian province of Battambang ceded to Thailand in 1941 a good exportable surplus would be about 150,000 tons less. All rice exports are going to Japan, or Japanese occupied areas. It seems probable that much of it goes by rail to Haiphong and only from there by the empty vessels which have brought military supplies.

It is understood that most of the rubber is being stored for the time being.

The financial position of the Government General of Indochina probably deteriorated further during the first seven months of the war, but may not be as bad as might at first be supposed. On the one hand charges incurred on behalf of the Japanese army continued; revenue from import and export duties was low and, as from July 1, the Government General assumed the payment to landlords of the rent due on premises which had been requisitioned and which continue to be requisitioned for the Japanese and on which the Japanese seldom pay more than a month's rent. On the other hand large sums of money normally sent to France, particularly by business firms, have remained in Indochina; payments due abroad for imports are negligible; and taxes have been increased either through raising the rates, lowering the exemptions, or both.

9. Axis Propaganda:

Two types of propaganda are being conducted in Indochina; the Japanese in favor of themselves and co-property for all Asiatics in a greater Asia, and the French in behalf of French administration in general and the Vichy government in particular.

The Japanese propaganda consists principally in showing Japanese motion pictures, news reels of the war, and educational films; staging exhibitions of Japanese art, particularly painting; bringing dramatic and other artists from Japan; distributing pamphlets and other literature; and publishing a large illustrated weekly newspaper. The Japanese also allow nothing derogatory of themselves or especially favorable to the Allies to appear in the French or vernacular press or to go over the radio. The French press, in fact, features Domei despatches and for the most part prints its selected Allied despatches in the final page. It is doubtful whether this Japanese propaganda is effective.

French propaganda features motion picture films and the publication in various forms of material on the achievements of France in Indochina. A fair which served this purpose was held in Hanoi in December 1941 and another is to be held in Saigon in December of this year. Every effort is being made to make the natives believe that the French still control the country, while social and other functions are staged to convince the natives of the French interest in them and of the cordial relations which have existed between the two peoples.

French propaganda is directed both towards the natives and toward the French and, in accordance with the Nazi-Vichy stress on youth, special emphasis is being laid on youth organizations and the value of sports for both the French and native young people. Numerous youth demonstrations and sporting spectacles have been staged. Summer camps are being

developed, a youth code has been drawn up, uniforms designed, and the responsibilities of youth stressed. The immediate response to this type of propaganda is strong, particularly among the natives who love spectacles, but how effective it will actually prove to be cannot yet be told.

Pictures, posters, quotations from, and laudatory statements regarding Marshal Petain are to be found everywhere. The French Legion, composed principally of small business men, clerks, mechanics, and low salaried government employees, is striving ever harder to set itself up as the leader of French life and chief interpreter of the Vichy code. The press and radio are extremely critical of the democracies and frequently violently anti-Ally, yet they seldom are positively pro-Axis.

It is doubtful whether French propaganda has been very effective except in its anti-British aspects, which have featured it since June 1940, and in the immediate response to its youth program.

10. Attitude of the French and Annamites:

So far as is known the Government General never made any attempt, at least in southern Indochina, to assist or communicate with American consular officers after the outbreak of war, although on March 23 the Japanese Consul called because, he said, the Governor General wished information regarding the welfare of consular officers and the conditions of their internment.

There were always two policemen, usually Annamite, stationed opposite the house in which the consular officers were interned, but their object appeared to be more to note those who made friendly signs to the internees or attempted to communicate with them than to guard them in any way. On one occasion in particular the Consulate's French clerk, Mme. Petra, came to the fence, and the next day, when she was out, the French police questioned her two young daughters in an effort to ascertain why she had called.

In this connection there is now reported to be an extensive Gestapo organization in Indochina particularly designed to detect those who express pro-Allied sentiments. Persons have on occasion been reported by their servants, and even in small private gatherings people are extremely careful in expressing opinions. In the early days of the war friends of British and American citizens were generally careful not to show undue friendliness or interest in their fate for fear of the possible consequences and, since that time, the French authorities have let it be known that it was not advisable to be seen in the vicinity of the British consular residence.

Nevertheless, British and American consular officers never observed any signs of hostility among the many persons who passed the house daily, nor on the several occasions when sporting or other events brought considerable crowds before the house. A competent observer who had had an opportunity to question many people since the outbreak of war has reached the conclusion that the French in Indochina may be divided into four groups: (1) 20 percent who are totally pro-Ally, (2) 20 percent who are pro-American but anti-British, (3) 20 percent who are totally indifferent as long as their own immediate welfare is not in question, and (4) 40 percent who are pro-Petain and the majority of whom are wholly pro-Axis. The pro-Ally group is predominantly commercial and the pro-Axis group predominantly governmental.

The majority of the native population is undoubtedly indifferent to the political aspects of the present struggle. Nevertheless, there is an appreciable group of upper class Annamites, particularly those who had relatives working for British or American interests -- some of whom have been interned by the Japanese because of "disloyalty" -- which is strongly anti-Japanese. There is also a lower class group which is anti-Japanese because the Japanese have made it difficult for them to obtain their normal articles of food and because the Japanese treat hired labor harshly and pay poorly.

(1) In this connection the following data is given regarding the most vulnerable points on the railway and highway between Haiphong and Saigon, proceeding from Haiphong to Hanoi and south to Saigon: leaving Haiphong there is one railway bridge and one small highway bridge. About 15 kilometers east of Haiphong, there is an important combined railway and highway bridge. Entering Hanoi there is an important railway and highway bridge which is 1.7 kilometers long. South of Hanoi there is a small but important railway and highway bridge 6 kilometers north of Thanh-Hoa. Immediately south of Vinh (at Benthuy) there is a large railway bridge where road traffic uses a ferry. A few kilometers south of Dong Hoi there is a railway bridge where road traffic again uses a ferry. Just north of Quang Tri there is an important railway and highway bridge. At Hue there is a railway bridge slightly west of the city and a highway bridge in it. At the Col des Nuages about 65 kilometers south of Hue the railway and highway run together along the cliffs, the railway under the highway in about three tunnels. At Quang Ngai there is one railway and one highway bridge. At Cap Varella the railway and highway run along the cliffs, the railway below the highway in the Baxbonneau tunnel. This is perhaps the most vulnerable spot in the whole line, since repair would probably be the most troublesome. It was the last section of the railway to be built and caused the French the greatest difficulty. One and a half kilometers south of Tyhoa and 128.5 kilometers north of Nha Trang a steel railway bridge runs close beside a concrete highway bridge. Each has long spans and both would be vulnerable to a single powerful bomb. Between Bien Hoa and Saigon about 5 kilometers south of Bien Hoa are two important combined railway and highway bridges about half a mile apart.

On the highway between Saigon and Phnom Penh there is one concrete bridge about 120 meters long about 85 kilometers west of Saigon and another similar bridge about five kilometers east of Phnom Penh.

Other possible bombing objectives outside of Haiphong, Hanoi, and Saigon are: a distillery 10 kilometers south of Hanoi on the Mandarin Road to Nam Dinh; a distillery near the railway and highway bridge at Than Hoa, and the railroad yards at Vinh which is more important than Saigon as a repair center.

ALBERT STOFFEL
Vice Consul
Saigon (1946-1948)

Albert Stoffel was raised in Rochester, New York. He graduated from the University of Rochester in 1938 with a degree in economics. In 1941, he entered the Royal Air Force Civilian Technical Corps in England. After several months there, he decided to return to the U.S. and join the Air Force as an aviation cadet. While in the service, he decided to take the Foreign Service Exam. He has also served in Canada, Germany, and France. He was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan on May 9, 1994.

Q: Very interesting, because I don't think there are many of our colleagues who had the experience you did, with the RAF, before the war.

Now your first assignment in the Foreign Service was to Saigon, in French Indochina. A city which has become famous since that time. Can you describe what Saigon was like physically when you arrived there in early 1947.

STOFFEL: As you perhaps know, Saigon had been known as the Paris of the East, before World War II. It still had elements of that atmosphere after World War II. The living was good, the social life was active, the French were in reasonable control. It was fairly typical, I think, of certain Foreign Service posts at that time.

I was the second Foreign Service Officer to arrive in Saigon after World War II. My chief was Charles S. Reed, an old-time Foreign Service Officer, in every sense of the word. He did the political work and I did the economic work. That sort of set my career throughout the Foreign Service. I was either on the economic side or, eventually, involved in aviation diplomacy.

Q: Was Saigon at that time a Consulate General? Or was that under Embassy Paris in any way?

STOFFEL: We were a Consulate General of a French colony. However, I don't recall that we had any direct connection with our Paris embassy. We did get guidance from the office of Southeast Asian Affairs in State.

Q: At that time, was there not a consulate in Hanoi?

STOFFEL: Yes.

Q: Did you have links with them?

STOFFEL: To a degree, yes. But because of the poor connections between the two places, we didn't travel there. There were occasional courier runs.

Q: Were the French suspicious of our motives at that time in Indochina?

STOFFEL: They were. For example, later, when I'd been transferred to Paris in 1955 I discovered that two Americans, myself and Laurie Gordon, an oil company director in Saigon,

who had earlier served with the OSS in Southern China and Northern Vietnam, had been named in, I believe it was, the National Assembly as spies. The suspicious work that I was doing, according to this allegation, was preparing World Trade Directory Reports for the Department of Commerce.

Q: Very suspicious work I would say.

Did we have any line to the Viet Minh at the time?

STOFFEL: One month after I arrived Mr. Reed went on leave and left me in-charge. At that point, within the first or second day that I was in-charge, a representative, who purported to be from Ho Chi Minh, came to the consulate to talk about Ho Chi Minh's political intentions. Cooperation with the French, of course, had already broken down on December 19, 1946. Next he would go to the Americans. Finally, only reluctantly, according to this story, would he go to the Soviets for support.

Q: Was there any confidence among the people, in the Consulate General, that the French could suppress the revolt?

STOFFEL: At that point yes. Security was fairly good in Saigon. Beyond the city proper there was a lot of unrest. We lived on the edge of the city. Every night my wife and I would play cards with a loaded 38 caliber pistol lying between us, because there was no protection from hand grenades or shots through the barred windows. When bullets would start coming through the garden, we would then raise a large American flag on the front porch. However, we never had to use our gun and we got fairly used to the sporadic shooting.

On one occasion coming home from dinner, as we turned a corner in my convertible Peugeot with the top down, something hit the car right under my left elbow. It turned out to be a poor quality hand grenade that didn't explode, fortunately, until it hit the ground and only put two small holes in the car. I just took off, not waiting to see what might follow.

Q: I can understand. Do you have any unusual experiences in your line of work there?

STOFFEL: Yes. Shortly after my arrival, we got a report that an American airplane had been found in Saigon harbor, in connection of the clearing of wrecks from that harbor. I was designated by the Consul General to go out in a small native canoe with a native diver and see what he would bring up.

He started out by bringing up 2 skulls, other bones and eventually 2 dogtags and a silk map of the area (which our military fliers carried at that time) to aid escape. We also recovered some other items from the cockpit of what turned out to be a U.S. navy TBM, a dive bomber, that apparently had been shot down about 2 years earlier before while strafing ships in the harbor.

At that time the consulate didn't have any funds for this purpose, so I had to pay for the diver and for the removal of the airplane. Sometime later, a U.S. Navy grave registration team arrived. They laid out the bones on the floor of my office and showed me that I, in effect, had 3

skeletons. They also reimbursed me for these funds. Letters from two of the families thanked me for personal items and especially for the fact that the relatives now knew that their loved ones had, at least, not suffered capture or a lingering death.

OSCAR VANCE ARMSTRONG
Chinese Language Officer
Saigon (1950)

Oscar Vance Armstrong was born in China of American parents. He entered the Foreign Service in 1946 and initially served in China. He had a short tour in Vietnam in 1950. A Chinese language specialist, his career was mainly in Asia. He was interviewed in 1991 by Willis Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG: I came back on home leave and then had a temporary assignment to Saigon. They wanted a Chinese language officer and the person who was assigned there wasn't going to arrive for some months so I had about four months in Saigon. This was back, of course, during the French involvement.

Q: Still French territory. This was a consulate.

ARMSTRONG: No. It became...I am not sure I am going to get my chronology right...we had an ambassador there, Ambassador Heath.

Q: I guess that was about when Vietnam had been set up, about 1950.

ARMSTRONG: Yes, this was 1950. That is about right. So I had about four months there.

Q: What was your impression of Saigon in those days?

ARMSTRONG: In Saigon, itself, it was not like Saigon of the late '60s and early '70s during our time there, because life went on fairly normally. There were limitations of travel. I did get up to Hanoi, but I did it by air, not by road. This was still some years away from Dienbienphu.

Q: Dienbienphu was 1954. So this was before the French power had really been broken.

ARMSTRONG: Yes, that is right. The French presence was still very strong. I was there for a sort of China watch. Watching the Chinese population, etc. There was also a large contingent of Chinese Nationalist soldiers that had retreated there and been interned there. My main contact with local officialdom was with the French civilian officer who was their man dealing with Chinese affairs.

Q: Basically an intelligence operation.

ARMSTRONG: Not intelligence in the normal sense. It was one more of trying to figure out the

mood of the Chinese population and what their role was in Vietnam, etc. I wasn't there long enough to become very knowledgeable about the situation.

JOHN F. MELBY
City Unspecified, Vietnam (1950)

John F. Melby was born in Iowa in 1913. He joined the Foreign Service in 1937 and served in Mexico, Venezuela, the Soviet Union, China, and Washington, DC. A victim of McCarthyism, he left the Service in 1953. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: I inadvertently forgot to ask Mr. Melby some questions about an important phase in his later times with the State Department. Mr. Melby, we didn't cover a trip you made to Vietnam. Could you tell when and what were the circumstances?

MELBY: Well, the French had been asking for military assistance, as they always were. And the government had been sort of stand-offish on the question of whether we should get involved. This was 1949. And even before then, we had an OSS mission in there with Ho Chi Minh, which was very close to him. And they were bringing out a lot of good information, as well as they were actually helping Ho Chi Minh in the war against Japan.

But even so, as soon as the war was over, the anti-communist forces in Washington started mustering strength. The whole bit with Ho Chi Minh came to nothing in the end. The mission was withdrawn. And we sort of were taking a position of supporting Bao Dai as the emperor, but not really getting involved. And General Marshall, the Secretary of State, didn't much want to be involved either. However, there came the development as to whether we -- when we got formal requests for aid for Indochina -- because it wasn't Vietnam then. There was a split in the Department between the Bureau for Far Eastern Affairs and Bureau for European Affairs. Europe, of course, wanted to give the French anything they wanted. And the Far East was adamantly opposed to becoming involved at all. After all, we were still smarting from the whole China debacle, where we knew we had a lot of lessons to learn. It was pretty uncertain whether we had to learn, really, most of them. Any of them!

So we just simply were not prepared to become involved in Vietnam, to which was added the fact that there was no Vietnamese experience in the Department. There was nobody who spoke Vietnamese. In fact, in the United States there was nobody who knew any Vietnamese. Of course, that would change over the years. But at this time, we literally didn't know what we would be getting into. But this didn't seem to bother Europe. You didn't have to know anything about Asia.

Q: When you say, "This didn't bother Europe," these were the people who were in the EUR Bureau. In the Department of State.

MELBY: Yes. That's right. After all, if you knew France and French, that was enough. You

didn't have to bother knowing anything about Asia. After all, they were the lesser breed without the pale, you know.

Well, the squabbling finally reached the Secretary, who took the matter to the President for a decision. And as was usually the case in those days, FE lost. And Mr. Truman signed an executive order saying that the United States was prepared to aid the French in their war against the Viet Minh -- it wasn't the Viet Cong then; it was the Viet Minh -- and he instructed the Department to put together a joint State-Defense military mission to go out there. Survey the situation, make recommendations as to the specific kinds of military aid that the French wanted and needed in that area.

In the end, I drew the assignment. I was pretty junior at this time. But, partly I got it, I guess, because of my China experience. They thought that might be helpful in analyzing what was going on in Vietnam. Partly it was that nobody who outranked me wanted to go at all, anyway. So that I went out as the chief of mission and my deputy was a lieutenant general of Marines. He was Bobby Erskine, which posed a few protocol problems in the beginning. Because the pentagon took a very dim view of a Foreign Service officer of my rank. I was class 3 at this time.

Q: Equivalent of a colonel.

MELBY: After I came back from there, I was promoted to class 2. I went up very fast in the Service, as a matter of fact.

We put together this mission. And I realized that -- when we started right out as we left from San Diego -- that I was going to have to have it out with the general and reach some sort of understanding. So we withdrew to our private compartment up front on the plane. We had our own plane. And Bobby and I battled it out and reached an understanding, and from then on, there was absolutely no problem. He and I became great friends and colleagues. Even in the troubled times, Erskine came to my support when I was having security problems. So the mission, from that standpoint, was a great success. It worked very well. When we arrived out there, it was ostensibly a military mission to Southeast Asia, but the real point was Vietnam. Let's face it, the whole thing was a cover. And we actually did go to every country in Southeast Asia, except Burma, which wouldn't let us in.

And, the job on the working level, I had a staff of about 20 officers with me, plus a couple from ECA and some people in the State Department. So it was a good big group. But at that level, they worked with their French opposite numbers very well. And actually, in three weeks, we really had everything that we needed to have in the way of information.

One of the things that we found we had to do was that the quality of intelligence that we were getting out of the area was so poor that we simply had to do it all ourselves.

Q: But why was the quality poor?

MELBY: Because the intelligence officers there -- Army, Navy, and so on -- all the attachés were incompetent.

Q: It was sort of a backwater to which we sent backwater people?

MELBY: That's right. And just one example, it was in Bangkok. I was trying to locate one of the dissident Kuomintang generals who had taken refuge in northern Thailand with a very sizable number of Kuomintang army troops. So I asked the military attaché where this man was and he said, "Well, he's up north now." I then, later on, asked the Marine Corps attaché -- who was also the Naval attaché -- if he knew. And he said, "Oh, no, he's over here," someplace else. And I asked a third attaché, and he gave me another answer. I said, "Well, that's fine. That's what I wanted to know." Because I'd had lunch that same day with this particular general in Bangkok. But they didn't even know that. This was the kind of intelligence that we were getting out of the area.

And we then proceeded from Saigon, where we spent three weeks.

Q: Saigon? Rather than Hanoi?

MELBY: The French headquarters were in Saigon. Everything was located in Saigon. The governor general was there, the commanding general of the French forces. They were all based in Saigon.

I went to Hanoi, which was a very charming, kind of French provincial sort of city.

From Saigon, we then stopped off in the Philippines, en route. But we went back to the Philippines because we had a pretty active military program there. And then we went on to Singapore, where the British were very anxious that we make a contribution to their guerrilla warfare against the Chinese dissidents there in Malaysia.

The headquarters for the Malaysian Federation was in Singapore, when McDonald was the High Commissioner for Southeast Asia. But Washington wasn't disposed to do anything for Malaysia, because Malaysia was the biggest dollar-earner in the British commonwealth. Therefore, the British presumably had the dollar exchange to buy their own equipment for Malaysia. But we had a nice time in Singapore. And McDonald was a very cordial guy.

From there we went to Indonesia. And then back to Thailand. Thailand was a place where, unfortunately, we stayed too long. We sort of wore out our welcome a little bit. Ed Stanton was ambassador there, who disapproved of the mission, to begin with. We were just there too long. Not only was the embassy fed up with having us around, but even the Thais were beginning to get a little bored with us, too. We were there almost a month.

Q: What were you doing?

MELBY: It ended up, we were providing as much military hardware for the Thai Army and Navy and Air Force as we were for Vietnam.

Q: You were looking at the Thai requirements and sending recommendations? And seeing

whether it made sense to continue it or not?

MELBY: Yes.

Q: How did the ambassador take this?

MELBY: He was opposed to it entirely.

Q: Was he opposed to our sending military equipment to Thailand? And your mission said yes, to do it?

MELBY: Yes.

Q: Why was the difference? What was the issue?

MELBY: The Pentagon decided that we were going to equip the Thai forces.

Q: Why didn't the ambassador want it? Usually ambassadors like to hand over things if they can.

MELBY: Ed Stanton was a China language officer. He had gone through the whole China bit, and he thought it was a waste of money and time. There wasn't any point in arming one faction in Thailand to fight another faction in another coup d'état, that we ought to keep our hands out of Thai politics.

Q: So there was not a matter of looking upon building this up as a bulwark against communism, as much as giving them weapons? You didn't feel that, without weapons, there was an immediate threat that might take over?

MELBY: Not an immediate threat in Thailand, no. The Thai armed services were a pretty competent bunch, incidentally. And the police, which had its own army, they were the most impressive military forces we saw in Southeast Asia.

Q: So you didn't feel that there was an imminent danger in Thailand. Were you under pressure from Washington to approve the sale of arms to Thailand, to keep a foot in the door? Was there a reason why?

MELBY: It was contingency aid, really. In case things went sour in Vietnam. And as it worked out over the years, there were big American bases in Thailand. About half of southern Thailand was one huge American Air Force base. And an awful lot of secret operations, bombing raids, were conducted out of Thailand.

Q: So contingency actually paid off.

MELBY: From that standpoint, yes, if you thought the war in Vietnam was worthwhile. Of course, I didn't.

Q: Let's go to your report on Vietnam. What did you see?

MELBY: The working stiff's got along fine with their French counterparts. We had trouble at the top, between me and Don Heath, who was the minister.

Q: He was my ambassador for a little while in Saudi Arabia, a long time ago.

MELBY: Well, Don was new to Southeast Asia, but I must say, he was trying to learn Vietnamese, which nobody else in the embassy was doing. And the French high commissioner and the commanding general of the French forces. And we just didn't see eye to eye on what was going on. Because my whole reaction -- and it didn't take more than a couple of weeks -- was that we were getting ourselves involved in something that we were totally without expertise to handle. We didn't know what we would be getting into. We didn't have anybody who really knew anything about Vietnam or what it was.

Q: You weren't saying, "This is a lost situation." The main thing is, we just don't know, and let's not go into something unless we know what it is.

MELBY: It isn't a question, "We don't know," but that what we do know is, "We're going to lose." Don Heath and I just disagreed because he'd been sort of taken into camp by the French. I made my report; I cabled it back to Washington -- and you could still do this. I cleared it with him, and he filed his dissent with it. And he cleared it with me. This was the kind of situation that didn't last very long, you know, as we got into the McCarthy period. But officers still did trust each other. And I just said, "We're getting ourselves into a totally untenable situation. It's all very well to say that this is step one. We go this far and no farther. Because it doesn't work that way. If step one doesn't work, then you've got to take step two. And it goes on and on. And once you become committed, there's no backing out, and we're just headed for disaster."

Q: Did you have a feeling, looking back on this with some objectivity, Heath had been ambassador before that in Bulgaria and had been kicked out of there. But anyway, he was a European hand more than not. You came out of, particularly your China experience, where you saw a very successful movement taking place. And I think all of us are traumatized by things that we have seen. Do you think that maybe it was because you were coming from two different perspectives of how things worked in the world? You saw that unless you had a very strong government, for instance, you saw that the communists had something going for them in Asia. And there wasn't much to stop them.

MELBY: The communists had something going for them because they had a nationalist appeal. They were first nationalists and second communists.

Yes. I was convinced that the French were going to lose, because they, too, never understood Asia or Asians. And they were conducting a positional warfare against a guerrilla army and they had no more chance of winning than Chiang Kai-shek had at winning against the communists. Because you're dealing with a situation in which conventional warfare just simply doesn't work.

Don Heath, of course, I think he was just taken in by the French. Ed Gullion was there. He was Counselor. Ed and I were classmates in the Service. Although Ed didn't say very much, I happen to know from talks I had with him that he thought we were making a mistake in becoming involved, too. Ed would later change his mind on a lot of things. But he hadn't done so yet.

My recommendation back to the Department was, "Please pass this on. Ask the President to reconsider his decision to go ahead and help the French."

Q: How about General Erskine?

MELBY: Erskine was of two minds. Being a Marine Corps general, force was always the answer. But on the other hand, Bobby was not without his insights. And he would say to me, "In the end, this has to be a political solution here. Anything we do militarily is only a holding operation. There has to be a political and economic solution to this whole question of Vietnam." So Erskine was basically backing up my position.

Q: What happened when you made this report?

MELBY: What happened was, I asked that the President read my report and reconsider. But you have to remember the time and the context, because I never got an answer out of it. You've got to remember that this was the summer of 1950. And Washington was just overwhelmed with the Korean War.

Q: June 25, 1950 was the invasion of North Korea into South Korea. And of course, we were thinking them in terms of stopping the communists wherever they were on the march.

MELBY: Yes, but nobody was thinking of Vietnam one way or the other. Before the Korean invasion ever started, mind you. On Vietnam, the President had decided as far back as February. This was based on NSC-68, that we were going to rearm the world. So any recommendations that I made, they were noted and nothing happened.

Q: You were mentioning to me yesterday that you had also sent something in about our intelligence operations.

MELBY: Rusk, the Assistant Secretary for the Far East, had asked me on the side to do an evaluation of our intelligence operations in Southeast Asia and send the report to him, because he'd been in intelligence on the Far East in the pentagon. Which I did. And it was a pretty strong statement that I made. Maybe I just stated it more strongly than it was, at least politically-wise. Because my comment was that the quality of our intelligence is so bad that it approaches malfeasance in office, and something had to be done.

And this, of course, though it was just for Rusk and Bill Lacey -- who was head of the Bureau for Southeast Asian Affairs -- eyes-alone for them, got circulated all over the government. It was a slip that happened in the code room someplace, I never knew just exactly where. And this is the way it came to Bedell Smith's attention. Bedell Smith was director of CIA. And Bedell was livid.

Finally one day, after I got back, Acheson called me in and said I'd better make an appointment to go over and see Bedell Smith and try to quiet him down because, "He's out to get you." Which I did, and it didn't get me anywhere. Bedell Smith wasn't buying it.

Q: What was his reaction when you saw him?

MELBY: "What do you know about intelligence, young man? Who are you to criticize intelligence?" If there was any satisfaction in it, incidentally, it was that within three months of my return from Southeast Asia, every intelligence officer in the entire area was replaced, including all the CIA operators, too. There was a whole new crew sent out. Not only CIA, but all the attachés were changed. So what it was worth, I don't know.

Q: Once again, I want to thank you very much for this. You were at interesting places at interesting times!

MELBY: Well, one of the little sidelights on the thing was, when I was over with Bedell Smith, Alan Dulles was over there. He was then Deputy Director of the CIA. He just sat in the corner and didn't say anything or participate in the conversation at all. He was just present.

The phone rang. And from the conversation, I could tell that the man who was calling Smith was the head of G-2, a major general, who was also livid. He'd seen the telegram on intelligence. And Bedell was trying to calm him down. He was saying, "Don't get excited now. We'll take care of it. We'll investigate this young man and find out what goes on."

CHARLOTTE LORIS
Clerk
Saigon (1950-1952)

Charlotte Loris was born in 1924 in Pennsylvania. She joined USIA in 1950 and served in Vietnam, Japan, Libya, Zaire, Indonesia, Korea, Switzerland, and Washington, DC. She was interviewed in 1989 by Max Kraus.

LORIS: This is the end of 1949, beginning of 1950. So I went back to Washington and got socked into the red tape, getting ready to go overseas and they said it would take months and months to have a security clearance, all of this. But actually three months later I left on an Air France plane for Paris and Saigon, which was located in what was then French Indochina. I was to replace a girl who had been murdered, an American girl.

Q: Had been murdered? In Saigon?

LORIS: She and a friend were entertaining and they were having a party and they went out to pick somebody up. They never solved it. They apparently were ambushed in their jeep.

Anyway, I arrived in Saigon -- .

Q: Just a minute. Before you arrived in Saigon, didn't that give you some pause about taking the kind of job that you -- .

LORIS: No, I wanted adventure.

Q: All right. So you arrived in Saigon when?

LORIS: Let me backtrack just a brief bit.

Q: Okay.

LORIS: I was assigned to Saigon. In those days you had a choice; I could have gone to Munich or to Rio or Saigon. Having always wanted to go to the Orient, to China, I picked Saigon. And they grabbed me with their arms, aha, we have one. So I went through the preparation and then went over to get my medical shots for old Saigon, which was still a French colony. While sitting in the Naval Department barracks waiting to get my shots, they asked me where I was going and I said Saigon. Well, this man came up to me and said, "Did I hear you say you were going to Saigon?" I said, "Yes." And this man said, "Well, I'm going to be the new American consul in Hanoi." Well, in those days, American consul, what's that? Hanoi? Where's that?

So we chatted a bit. I was going out to Saigon as a clerk, class FSS-13, I think it was, that paid \$2,850 a year. But all your transportation was paid. So this very kindly gentleman, who sort of walked like a penguin, gave me his name, which was Wendall Blanke. He asked me when I was leaving and I said I was going up to New York for a few days and then to Paris where I would be spending three days and then I was booked for a flight from Paris to Saigon. He said, "I will meet you at the airport in Paris and buy you a drink." I thought, this is great, what a way to go. So I had an exciting trip from New York to Paris but I won't go into detail on it.

On the day I came to leave Paris I went to the airport and was checked in. I sat down at a bench, because it wasn't a fancy airport in those days, and this man sort of walked up to me, waddling like a penguin, sat down beside me. No cocktail lounge. He pulls out a flask and we have a drink of brandy from the flask, which I had never had before.

Q: So he did make good on the offer of a drink in Paris.

LORIS: Yes, he bought me a drink out of his flask.

Q: And that was Wendall Blanke.

LORIS: It was Wendall Blanke. Then we get on this little DC-3 plane -- we didn't have jets in those days -- and we flew across France and into Tunis, Morocco, Algiers. The plane, except for Wendall and myself, was loaded with French Foreign Legionnaires going to French Indochina to help the French.

So we're on this plane and we're leaving Tunis and I said, Wendall -- he's sitting next to me --

there's something wrong with this plane. And about that time the pilot announces, we've lost an engine. It's a two-engine plane. So we went back to Tunis and stayed a few days. They flew down a new engine from Paris. We took off again and went via North Africa to Cairo, one of the stops. Cairo was an all-day stop and it was Easter Sunday. It was hot, sticky, with no air conditioning. I had with me an Agatha Christie mystery book, which I read three times in the airport, and drank hot citronade with flies sitting on the rim of the glass. We finally --

Q: What?

LORIS: Flies.

Q: No, what did you drink?

LORIS: Citronade. Without gin or vodka, just plain citronade. Sticky stuff. And flies swarming around. Finally we take off and we go via Burma and what have you. We finally get to Saigon and it was three days later, four. But remember, this was a DC-3.

Q: All the way on a DC-3 from Paris to Saigon.

LORIS: Greatest plane ever made.

Q: I know.

LORIS: They're still flying.

Q: I know.

LORIS: So we finally arrived in Saigon in the morning and it's hot and sticky. We get off the plane and this young man comes out and he says, "are you Charlotte Loris." And I said, "yes." He said, "well, I'm here to meet you." I said, "oh, well, there's another gentleman with me." He said, "Who?" I said, "Wendall Blanke." He said, "Oh, my God, the new consul for Hanoi." And nobody was there to meet him. But we pile in the jeep together and go into Saigon to this funny little consulate general. Sticky and hot. But that's the way Wendall and I arrived in town.

Then I was taken up -- I dropped my bags off, they took me into the consulate general and Ed Gullion was the chargé d'affaires.

Q: And that was approximately what date?

LORIS: About April 2nd, 1950.

Q: 1950. So you are in Saigon -- .

LORIS: And I'm at the consulate general. We go up these little stairs and we arrive in this small office and go into this bigger office where Ed Gullion was charge. And there sits my friend, Wendall Blanke. So Ed Gullion says, "Oh, Wendall, I would like you to meet our new clerk-

typist, Charlotte." He said, "Meet her? I've slept with her on a plane for three nights." Great hilarity. Anyway, Wendall and Ed and I were friends from then on.

Then I was in Saigon, oh, about two weeks, assigned to the information division where the peripatetic Francis Cunningham was the PAO, a State Department man. There weren't many people in Saigon and I think I was the only female that knew shorthand. So I'm sitting at my desk about two weeks after I'm there and a car comes and they said, "are you ready to go, Miss Loris?" I said, "Go where?" "Oh, you're taking the minutes of the meeting." "What meeting?" So I grabbed a couple of shorthand notebooks and a bunch of pencils. Now remember, our offices were not air conditioned and it was sticky hot. So Francis Cunningham says, "Charlotte, you have been elected to take the notes of this meeting." So he takes me downstairs and bundles me into this small car which we had in those days. And it's a meeting of the French High Militaire and the Commandant and the High Commissioner, an American military group and high Vietnamese officials to discuss the French Indochina War.

I arrived and was swept through the palace gates by the gendarmes, Mademoiselle Loris? Yes. On I went, up and pattered down this marble hallway in my sandals, which were clipping-clapping, and my legs were running sweat. They escort me down to big double doors, I open the doors, and there sit 40 men.

Q: Palace?

F: This was the High Commissioner's Palace.

Q: French High Commissioner's Palace in Saigon?

LORIS: In Saigon. And I collapse in a chair at the door, realizing the meeting is now in session, I got out my notebook and started taking notes. Then there was a break shortly after I arrived, and Ed Gullion came over and escorted me to the center of this big table where all of the interpreters, the maps and everything else were, and for one solid week -- five days -- all I did all day was take notes. There were many strange names of the battlefields in northern Indochina which of course I did not know. But Gullion was very kind. I would put a number down and he would write the name down and put the number so that when I transcribed the notes later I was able to fit the whole thing together.

Q: Who were the other participants in this meeting?

LORIS: The French High Commissioner, high French military command, and I can't remember all the names, and high American military, generals, and the highest Vietnamese in those days. There were about 40 people in all. We did not in those days have tape recorders or computers or anything like that, and I was the only person who was taking the notes.

Q: Only person among all of these -- ? Nobody else?

LORIS: Nobody else. And they used to wrap me up in an armored vehicle, take me back to the Consulate, shut me up in a room where I'd type up these notes which later became history.

Q: I bet.

LORIS: I felt like Mata Hari.

Anyway, life proceeded. A few weeks later I walked down the street to my office, went around the corner, and a machine gun gunned down the head of the French Surate right in front of me. I jumped in a doorway to avoid the bullets, and survived.

After that, because the French did not have many people, the Korean War had started, and communiques were coming in from Korea and Hanoi, again I was selected to go. The French did not have anybody and neither did the Vietnamese. I used to get up at 4:30 in the morning, ride a cycle downtown to the French Chamber of Commerce and type on a French typewriter, which I had never seen before, in French, the communiques. Then I would leave there about 10:00 --

Q: The communiques about the war?

LORIS: About the war in Hanoi and the Korean war.

Q: And the Korean war?

LORIS: It had started. Then I went back to my office about 10:00 and worked all day there. It was a very exciting time.

Q: What were these communiques for? Were they for --

LORIS: For the French, for the government, the French, and released to the press.

Anyway, it was a very exciting two years in Saigon and many adventures. I'm not going to tell you all of them. Too bad. You would love it.

Q: Well, I think that I know some of the ones that you want to leave off the record.

LORIS: Right.

Q: However, if I'm not mistaken, and I hope you will put this on the record, I think you told me once that while you were in Saigon you got acquainted with Graham Greene and he took you to an opium den.

LORIS: Oh, very much so. I met Graham Greene at a cocktail party where, you know, there were many cocktail parties. He is a great reprobate and loves to have somebody listen to him. Well, I like to talk, but I also like to listen. So we got together a number of times and one evening we were discussing the ethnic background of Chinese and Asians and I said, I've always wanted to go to an opium den. He said, let's go tonight, after dinner. I said fine. So we go down after this cocktail party and we have dinner in a restaurant. Then he said, we won't drive, we'll just take a bicycle chair which is called a cyclo. So we get in the cyclo and the guy pedals us out to this

opium den. Graham Greene was an habitue of opium dens and he knew Asia.

So we get out in this dimly lit place and go in. Mamasan, or madame, didn't want me to come in because she recognized that I was American. So we sat in this little overheated room with stuffed settees, drank brandy and soda with no ice, and she wouldn't let us into the big room where the habitues go. But we went into a private room.

It was just like I expected it to be. Absolutely fascinating. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I did want Graham Greene to buy me the silver opium pipe but he didn't. So he smoked nine pipes and I smoked three. But I didn't inhale because I was scared shitless. But it was fun.

Q: Since you are retired, they will not --

F: Fire me.

Q: -- start a security investigation for drug abuse.

LORIS: Why not find out what the people do? I can understand. As Graham Greene, when we used to talk, he said try to understand these people that live in these overpopulated, crowded areas of the world, half of them sleep at day, half at night, there's not enough room for them all to sleep at night, so smoke opium or whatever. Go out on cloud nine.

Q: Graham Greene wrote a novel about Saigon called, if I'm not mistaken, The Quiet American.

LORIS: There are several composite characters in there, all of which I recognized. It was a good book. Read it.

Q: Including -- is one of the composite characters at least in part Charlotte Loris?

LORIS: Yes.

Q: I'll have to read it.

LORIS: Then I left Saigon after many exciting adventures. I wish I would recount them all, they are in my mind.

Q: We are now talking about what year?

LORIS: I left in 1952. And I went to -- but first I made several trips. I went to Bangkok as a side trip. I wanted to meet the writer of the Bangkok Editor, which is one of the things that convinced me to go to that area of the world. He had been a former member of the OSS and a friend of Jim Thompson's. I did meet him and his Thai mistress, and a few other interesting people, for a glorious weekend.

Anyhow, I was finally taken out of Saigon and assigned -- .

Q: Jim Thompson, was he already at that time into Thai silk?

LORIS: Oh, yes, but he just had a very small shop which was about as big as a three-cornered closet. It was fabulous. It was nothing like it is now. He had not done "The King and I" or any of those costumes. But he was a very interesting person. I met a lot of interesting people. In spite of the fact that I was an FSS-13. I did play a lot of tennis and met people that way. Some interesting stories about that but I won't go into it because I had the right to play on the Palace courts and a few other places.

THOMAS J. CORCORAN
Political Officer
Saigon (1950-1953)

Consul
Hanoi (1954-1955)

Thomas J. Corcoran was born in New York in 1920. He entered the Foreign Service in 1948. He served in Spain, Laos, Cambodia, and Burundi, where he was ambassador. He served three times in Vietnam: in Saigon (1950-1953), Hanoi (1954-1955), and in Saigon (1965-1966).

Q: I want to concentrate mainly on your time in Indochina, because this is where you did spend I can almost say an inordinate amount of time for a Foreign Service officer. How did you get into this particular corner of the woods?

CORCORAN: That started in Spain. The consulate was inspected by Foreign Service inspector Wilson Flake, who asked me where I would like to go next. I said that having started in a consular post and learned Spanish, I'd like to go to a diplomatic post where I could use French, which I had already studied in school for many years. He said, "Fine." Shortly thereafter, I got orders to Saigon, which had not been a diplomatic post when we were discussing this, but which had been converted from a consulate general to a legation right about that time in 1950.

Q: I'm confused. How was Indochina divided up then? I thought Hanoi was sort of the center.

CORCORAN: In the French period, Vietnam was really in three parts. You had the empire of Annam, the middle, which had a French resident.

Q: That was Hue?

CORCORAN: The capital of Annam was Hue. You had North Vietnam (Tonkin), which was largely under military administration, although it was technically under the imperial crown, but was run by the French Army. Then you had South Vietnam, which was a French colony, Cochin China. So you had three different administrations there.

But with the French reoccupation at the end of World War II, after the Japanese had taken it over, the Chinese Nationalists in the north and the British in the south had accepted the Japanese surrender. The French went back in. There was a very complex period of negotiating with Ho Chi Minh, who was the leader of the Communists, who had come out of the bush and taken over Hanoi initially at the end of the war. They followed on the Chinese Nationalist occupation and coexisted with them for a while. But then the French moved in there. It was a very complicated period of negotiations between the French and the North Vietnamese, first starting with the French admiral, D'Argenlieu, who was General de Gaulle's representative and commander in chief. Then he was replaced eventually by General LeClerc. General LeClerc was the Army commander in the north.

All of these details have to be sorted out, because I've been in that area three times over a period of 30 years, actually four times, with three desk tours. It needs sorting out of the different periods.

The original sort of modus vivendi which the French worked out there began to break down in 1946. Jean Sainteny, who had been in the French colonial service, and who was the son-in-law of Albert Sarraut, who had been the governor general of Indochina and a French cabinet minister, went back in and tried to deal with Ho Chi Minh and re-establish the French presence in the north. For a variety of reasons, that broke down in 1946, and that's when the war really started.

Q: I want to come back now to what you were doing. This gives an idea that it was a complex situation. You were sent to Saigon as what?

CORCORAN: Initially, there had been a consulate in Hanoi and a consulate general in Saigon. As I understand it in the old days, during the hot season, the government moved to the north, and consular representatives would follow them there. But when the war ended, we maintained a consulate in Hanoi and a consulate general in Saigon, two consular posts. Then in 1950, when the French union concept was being established, the other two countries, Laos and Cambodia, had their own problems. Laos had also been divided into three parts, Luang Prabang, the kingdom in the north, Champassak, the kingdom in the south, and Vientiane, a sort of expired kingdom, in the middle, which was under direct French administration. The French union concept was that these three separate countries, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, would be members of the French union, each with its own monarchical form of government, a king in Laos, a king in Cambodia, and the ex-emperor of Annam, who was supposed to be accepted as the ruler of Vietnam.

As part of supporting this, in 1950 we agreed to diplomatic recognition of each of these countries, and we sent one minister, Donald Heath, who resided in Saigon. He kept a small branch office with a junior officer in Vientiane and one in Phnom Penh. So I first went to Saigon when it was a legation, and I was a political officer. I was, at that time, a third secretary. But after a few months there, I was sent up to relieve the man who was in Vientiane.

Q: When were you in Hanoi?

CORCORAN: I was there from about the beginning of September 1954 until about December 12, 1955. I was there about 14 months.

Q: We had some trouble on the previous tape. Some of this may be repetitious. How would you describe your principal job there?

CORCORAN: The main thing was to point out that we were not pulling out, we weren't prejudging the Geneva Conference as the end of everything. It was an armistice. We were going to wait and see what happened. We were supporting the government in the south, but we were keeping consular representation in the north. According to tradition and custom, the people holding the real power in the north, the Communists, could have expelled us if they had chosen so to do. But they chose, instead, to say that they just did not recognize us. But of course, we did exist, and we had employees, we had our buildings, two buildings which we owned, and for a while, a couple which we leased just as an anchor to windward, and had people spread out. We obeyed the curfews and we paid our electricity bills and things of that sort. But our main purpose there was to wait and see what happened, rather than just climb aboard airplanes and get out. They did, in effect, deal with us through the municipal Military and Administrative Council of Hanoi, which was, in effect, a municipal government with both military and civilian functions.

At one point, they actually sent troops into my house during preparation for a parade. My house was on the big Place Ba Dinh, a central place where Ho Chi Minh's tomb is now. I was awakened in the middle of the night by my house boy who said the Viet Minh had arrived. They explained to me that in preparation for a parade the next day, they were putting troops and machine guns on the roofs of the building. I said, well, I couldn't argue with that, I suppose, and they could go up there on the roof. I couldn't stop them. I said, "Please use the back stairs and stay out of the house," which they did. They stayed there until after the parade. They did the same thing on some other buildings in the area. Actually, when the parade came by, I went out to watch it, and a French-speaking Communist policeman gave me a running description of what was going on, obviously part of the propaganda department. So there again, they knew who we were and what we were up to.

As I say, we were very careful not to try to do anything clandestine or subversive or anything of that sort. It would have been hopeless in that situation. Our main purpose was just to stay there and then keep the possibility of dealing with whatever came up.

As time went on, a difference developed between the way they treated us and the other non-Communist representatives. You had the British consul general, who, as I said, was an ipso facto agent of Anthony Eden, who was the co-chairman of the Geneva Conference. You had the French Sainteny mission (his *nom de guerre*) and he was accredited by Mendes France personally to the government of North Vietnam.

Q: Mendes France was the prime minister.

CORCORAN: Yes, who had forced the Geneva Conference in 1953. There was also the French military mission, actually a liaison mission with the International Control Commission, headed

by General Groot de Beaufort. There was the Indian chairman of the international commission, Mr. Desai, who later became number two in the Indian foreign office. And there was the Canadian delegate, Brigadier Sherwood Lett, who was a war hero, who took part in the famous Canadian landing at Dieppe, was a lawyer, and who later ended up and died as Chief Justice of British Columbia. He was the Canadian representative on the commission. Then there was a Polish delegation headed by a man named Ogrodinszki. He was a complete Communist doing the bidding of the North Vietnamese. At that time I don't think you could expect anything else.

On the other hand, the Canadians, who were trying to defend the free world's interests, were not in the same relationship with us at all. They were trying to help us out as much as they could, but they had their own standards of propriety.

The Indians were somewhat in between. The Indians represented the personal policy of Nehru, which was that the important thing was the end of colonialism and the independence of former Asian countries, and the Communist thing wasn't to be worried about too much; that it would sort itself out later. Actually, Nehru came through on a visit. I met him briefly on this one occasion. He came through early on and talked to everybody.

Then, of course, the Indians also had a consul general. They had a vice consul there, and they sent a consul general, who was a man named Sahay, Anand Mohan Sahay, accompanied by his very beautiful daughter. He had an interesting history. He had been at one point the private secretary to Rajendra Prasad, who later became vice president of India. He had also been involved in the Indian National Congress of Subhas Chandra Bose, a Japanese collaborationist, and he had actually fled to Japan and was caught by the British and sent back to India to be tried for treason. But Nehru was his lawyer, the lawyer for all of these people, and they could handle that. So he was a nice man on the surface, very friendly, but he wasn't too realistic. At one point, I guess I can tell you this now -- is this going to be published?

Q: It will be in transcript form, and researchers will be able to use it.

CORCORAN: Well, then, he wanted to give a reception for all hands, including me and the government officials of North Vietnam, and they, of course, wanted to receive the invitation list in advance. They saw my name on it and they wouldn't come if I showed up. I told him, well, forget it, I wouldn't come. I didn't want to embarrass him. But he said, "Yeah, but that's not good enough. I've got to be able to prove to them that you're not coming." I said, "Okay, I'll write you a letter saying I'm diplomatically ill," which I did, and that solved that. This man's background was general good will for all occasions, but he didn't realize what he was dealing with. Some of the people in the Indian delegation to the control commission were a lot more sophisticated, and they had a certain range of opinions.

Q: I'd like to go back, if we may, again, because I'm concerned this might not have come out on the previous tape, about your knowledge of and reporting on the land reform, which was reportedly quite a bloody affair.

CORCORAN: The real details on that didn't come out until much later, when a Frenchman wrote a book, and when the government itself admitted they had made a mistake and killed a lot of

people they shouldn't have killed. But it was just beginning to come out. In some cases, there were trials of people reported on in the press. There was one trial, which I saw part of in Hanoi. But we had to rely largely on the press for those reports, and in some of them, the main charge was being a rich exploiter of the poor, a capitalist exploiter. But this varied. The main problem, I gather, was that standards varied from province to province and district to district. Somebody who might be a cruel, wicked landowner in one area might be just one of the people in another, because the property values and income values varied. This may have been the root of their problem. They had an open-air application of the land reform on the Chinese model, but it became clear that some people were being punished for what other people were not being punished for in a different area.

Q: You mentioned that you tried to attend one open-air meeting and were sort of run off.

CORCORAN: Yes. I couldn't have really understood, anyway. I didn't have Vietnamese. But I was recognized as an outsider.

Most of the other trials were held out in the countryside, and you'd get reports on them in the press. As it emerged later, I didn't realize it at the time, but I realized later that one of the main problems was an awful lot of people were killed and the standard kind of varied from province to province. So this had a general unwholesome effect on the people themselves, because some of them could figure out that somebody was being punished for being a poor miserable landowner, instead of a rich landowner. The standards were off.

As I say, the government recognized this at one point. But some experts who followed this more closely than I did later on took the line that they really got in trouble when they eased up on the land reform program. There were some demonstrations in the countryside, really tough ones. Some reporting by some of the French writers indicated that there was a pretty violent uprising. But some of the Sovietologists took a look at these things and said that they had the real trouble after they pulled back on the land reform, in other words, when they showed signs of moderation. That encouraged people to protest more. I really would have to go back into the files.

Q: How did you leave?

CORCORAN: We were there for a total of 14 months. We left in early December. But in September, we could see signs of tightening up. For example, they required all of us, including Americans, to register as aliens with the government. They sent a big form about the size of that map.

Q: Pointing to a large map.

CORCORAN: Filling in all your personal history and whatnot. We could see this was the initial step of closing in on us. Then they wanted to come and interview us, each individual American. I said yes, but I would sit in on all the interrogations as though they were my own, and they agreed to that. They were asking sort of nuisance questions, and I would intervene after a while. They said, "You said you didn't speak Vietnamese." Well, I didn't speak Vietnamese, but I could just

see the way they were going, just wasting time and harassing people. We filled out these forms, and they inspected the place and saw we had a lot of radio equipment, which they obviously knew we had. We had been broadcasting every day for the last year as our only means of communication. We couldn't use the mail. So I could sense by the tone of this, something was going to happen.

Early on, after the British started making trips, we had applied for permission to send people in and out. None of them were accepted or refused, but we had gotten a bad publicity campaign as our only reply, so we let that ride; figured that could wait; we'd rely on the radio. But at this point, with the detailed census statement things became tough. At one point, they came in and the Army tried to inspect the place. We asked them out, and they left. When they moved into my house, they had a really plausible pretext, security for the parade. They were doing it to the Russians and the Poles and everybody else, so I couldn't complain. But it became clear that on this occasion, they were getting ready to do something. I could sense that things were tightening up.

What we did was make a plan, which we just sent in by telegram saying, "if this happens, we will do thus and so," and try to destroy classified material, of which we had very little. We would try to communicate by other means, a very simple code.

Sure enough, I suppose it was not more than a week or so after that, I was summoned in one rainy day to the municipal commission, and I had to walk through a flooded street to get to my car. The committee was sitting behind the table there, and they said, "We brought you in to tell you that you're not authorized to use your radio. Stop using it."

I said, "I don't know, this is interesting. When did this become effective?"

"Right now."

I went back and did not use the radio to report that, because that would have been a technical trap I'd have been walking into. What I did was draw up a telegram and send it through the post office, PTT, thinking that if we could survive in that old-fashioned way, that would be all right, too. They held the telegram for several days and then returned it unsent, said no route existed, which was quite false, because they had routes through Peking and Moscow, and then on to the outside world, and to Hong Kong. So what I did was send copies also to my various colleagues and the British, who were supposed to be our protecting power if we got out, sent theirs off, and the French sent theirs off, and the Canadians sent theirs off, so Washington got the news. They wondered why we'd gone off the air, but they got the news pretty quickly.

Then it was a question of getting out. I thought the appropriate thing was not to act in terms of just slam, bang, everybody out. It's easier said than done in a case like that. I said, "We ought to go slowly." In fact, one of the Indians told me, "I'm sure they don't really mean this. You ought to just hang on. Maybe they want you to stay." I said, "Well, I'll try." My other reason for trying it that way was I didn't want to show any signs of desperation to get out. I think if I tried to hang on, they would be less likely to keep us there. So we sent out people one at a time until I got down to one vice consul, who was also the administrative officer and the cashier. He, the man I

wanted to keep with me, and I left together, turning it over to the British in due form. We had the regular transfer of the two buildings we owned, and a transfer of our consular function. With the approval of the foreign office, the British consul and I cosigned this. We went out to the airport and left.

Q: Were these done under instructions from Washington? Were you able, through the other: British, French, Canadians, to keep some . . .

CORCORAN: After this initial report, we narrowed it down to the British, since they traditionally, we understood, would represent us. I did it through the other people just to make sure the word got out. But it was pretty clear that we would have to do this. We developed the details with the British, and we left the two buildings there. They were taken over, I gather, later on. My house was used by some Communist diplomat, I think, or by some Communist agency. The office became the headquarters of the liberation front of South Vietnam for many years.

Then, strangely, when I was in Burundi, I was asked by somebody in the department for information about property. This is when Jimmy Carter was thinking of reopening there. I said, "Look in the files for 1955. It's all there." They did. They kept the files in Milwaukee or someplace. They got it quickly, and they had all the documents, inventories, titles for the two buildings, and the Department said the Vietnamese would let us have those two back. These were the two we owned. We had rented some others just to give us alternatives. They had progressively moved foreigners out at different times. But the rented buildings they took over pretty quickly. These two buildings, which we turned over at the end, which we retained title to, we made it clear that we did, otherwise, there was no way we could have them back. I think the plans were proceeding to move some sort of diplomatic representation in there. Then, of course, the North Vietnamese moved into Cambodia.

The only suggestion I gave to anybody immediately when I left, and also at this much later date, was if you do go in there with any sort of representation, you've got to insist that you have your own territory. A lot of European countries were operating in hotel rooms for years, and considered it a great victory if they got a second hotel room. This is preposterous. You can't function unless you can have a certain degree of . . .

Q: Space.

CORCORAN: Certainly a degree of space, and a certain degree of security, even though the security would always be a problem. So there it is. This goes back to the last days of the Carter era, about 1980.

PAUL M. KATTENBURG
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Washington, DC (1950-1955)

Country Officer, East Asia Bureau

Washington, DC (1963-1964)

Political Officer, Policy Planning Washington, DC (1964-1965)

Dr. Paul M. Kattenburg was born in Belgium in 1922 and came to the United States in 1940. He joined the Department of State in 1950 as a research specialist and entered the Foreign Service in 1956. He served in Germany, the Philippines, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed in 1990 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

KATTENBURG: We had reasonably good relations with Indonesia in the period '50 to '52.

On Indochina that is quite a different story.

Q: Okay, let's move to Indochina then.

KATTENBURG: I switched with Al Seligmann, who was quite tired of Indochina business, and none of us had been Wristonized at this point. We were civil servants. I was more than willing to change my scenery from Indonesia to Indochina. Here I fell into quite a different story because of the struggle between the bureaus that we in the Division Research Far East supported: the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, on the one hand, and the various personalities in that bureau including Mr. Reed the head of Southeast Asian Affairs, who had at one time been consul general in Hanoi, and the European Bureau on the other hand. Relations were quite strained.

I spoke French and I was sort of a natural in a way to do Indochina as so much of the documentation and the analysis had to be through French material. Jack Lydman and I established a pretty close relation with the working people on the Indochina Desk in the Far East Bureau -- this was the period '52 through early '55. I had spent the summer of 1952 in Saigon at the Embassy under Don Heath, the ambassador. This was a period of conflict within the Embassy as well because Ed Gullion, who was his DCM, opposed the pro-French policy. He supported greater independence for Bao Dai's Associated State of Vietnam. We had provided the French support since early 1950, when we had started giving them economic and some military assistance. We increased the military assistance a couple of years later when the French started having a tough time with the war. In any event, as far as the relations within the Department, we had a fairly tough time holding a point of view which on the whole, I think, was supportive of assistance to Bao Dai's Vietnam. We felt we should move faster towards independence. I don't know if this is the place to go into detail on all that...

Q: What was the situation in Vietnam? You talked about the Associated States.

KATTENBURG: These were created in 1948 under the Baie d'Along Agreement, and all this is recorded in a lot of literature so it is easy to get a hold of. Our policy anchored itself in support of the French when we recognized Vietnam -- Laos and Cambodia were secondary problems. They didn't really achieve full recognition. We maintained merely Chargés in Vientiane and Phnom Penh. In fact they were in many ways dependent on the Embassy in Saigon.

Q: Our Embassy was in Saigon and not in Hanoi?

KATTENBURG: No, our Embassy was in Saigon where the French had re-established the capital.

Q: I see.

KATTENBURG: Bao Dai was in Saigon with a summer home in Dalat. We maintained a Consulate in Hanoi until the summer of 1955. Here, before I forget, I would like to clarify something because some of the literature incorrectly assumed that we closed the Consulate in Hanoi after the Geneva Accords of July 20, 1954. South Vietnam took what had been the French territory south of the 17th parallel or the Bao Dai area under the French, if you want. But we did not close the Consulate in Hanoi. It remained under Tom Corcoran, who closed it in the summer of 1955. I was the person on the Desk at that time who recommended him for the Superior Service Award, which he got for the remarkable job he did in quietly, efficiently and thoroughly closing the Consulate operation.

The Embassy, in those intervening years, '52 when I started working on Indochina and first went out there on detail through '55, when I went back again, was under Don Heath virtually the entire time. He may have left in 1954, but I don't think so. In any event there was a mission sent out by the President and Secretary Dulles in 1954, under General J. Lawton Collins, a famous mission.

This leads us to a very interesting episode about a key meeting on Vietnam that I described somewhere in my book, but not in great detail. The meeting took place in late April or May, 1955 during the Sect Battle, so called, in the city of Saigon. When Ngo Dinh Diem, who had by then returned, that is, post-Geneva, as the new President of the Republic of Vietnam, was under siege by the Sects, so called Binh Xuyen. A meeting was held in the Department in late April or early May 1955, chaired by Under Secretary Robert Murphy, to consider a report by General Collins who had been sent on that mission by the President and his political advisor Paul Sturm. They recommended going easy on support for Ngo Dinh Diem and a possible change in government if someone able to handle the situation could be found. I think that was the essence really of the meeting.

At that point Brig. General Edward Landsdale had already been moved from Manila, where he had supported Magsaysay under auspices of the Agency, of course, to Saigon where he and a number of other Americans, some of whom played a very important role and were private Americans, not necessarily directly linked with the Agency, had supported Ngo Dinh Diem. During the time of the meeting a general who had been loyal to Ngo Dinh Diem was able to take care of the city and push the Binh Xuyen back and out of the city, thereby actually solving the situation on the ground in favor of Ngo Dinh Diem. The meeting just naturally gravitated in that direction.

I, myself, during this time in INR supported the Diem regime. I thought Diem was quite capable of holding the situation and I would have hated to see a change made which would have brought in some uncertain military leaders -- as happened ten years later.

Q: Yes.

KATTENBURG: Immediately after this particular meeting, I went out to Vietnam. It had been decided that I would take the Desk in the fall of 1955 to succeed the two people who had been working on Indochina in the Bureau. The director of the Bureau of Southeast Asian Affairs was Philip Bonsal and his Indochina Desk officer was an army colonel, who came into the State Department at the end of the war, but did not join the Foreign Service, to the best of my knowledge. This was Robert Hoey who played a key role in the whole period of the French war. He was assisted, and very ably so, by FSO John Getz, later U.S. Ambassador to Malta before retirement [who can be interviewed, living in North Carolina], with whom I was very close from the INR vantage point during this whole period.

Somewhere or other it was decided, I think with Jack Lydman and other Bureau people, that I would go to Saigon. Now in the summer of '55 I was involved with the question of how to handle the provision of the Geneva Accords of 1954 which required consultation between the two zones of Vietnam, the Peoples Republic of Vietnam north of the 17th parallel, temporary demarcation line, and the government south of that line, that is the Republic of Vietnam. The political part of the Accords had called for interzonal consultations which would lead to all-Vietnam elections to be held in July of 1956, two years after the signing of the Accords. The consultations, of course, had to bear on the question of what the elections were for, what kind of body, what sort of constitution would there be, what method would be used for these elections, was there to be a parliament elected, etc., none of which was determined in the Accords, except that the elections would be by secret ballot. During the year '54-'55 I, from my desk in INR, worked together with Ed Gullion, in the Policy Planning Council, on preparing various papers for the Secretary. The policy in the end shuffled itself out to support for Ngo Dinh Diem. Whatever he wanted, we would support. That was what was essentially confirmed in the 1955 meeting that Murphy held. While the general in Saigon, who was Little Minh or Tran Van Minh, won the war against the Sects in support of Diem, Landsdale supported Diem, Wesley Fishel from Michigan State University, who was the other very important American there, supported him. It was decided at that meeting, although no details were forthcoming that day, but I recall very clearly a discussion of the replacement of the ambassador and designee, Freddy Reinhardt, who went out almost immediately afterwards.

Q: What was your impression of Donald Heath? Both how he ran the Embassy and also how we viewed the situation because he was there during an important time.

KATTENBURG: Oh sure. That's right. I should say that Ambassador Heath was a charming person. I never got to know him very well, but from my observation of him he felt that our policy should be to support a very gradual transition to independence. He was very conscious of Dulles' anti-communism and of his fear that another loss to communism after the loss in China would be a defeat for us, therefore Heath supported most of the French moves. In the end he was strongly pro-French and against giving the Vietnamese greater independence, which Gullion wanted. We had quite a struggle there in '52 to '54, between Gullion and Heath. I hope I have the timing right. Actually if Gullion left earlier the struggle occurred between '50 and '52 and had gone on and grown apace during that time. It was described in a novel by Bob Shaplen of the New Yorker, called "A Forest of Tigers." It is quite accurate as Shaplen was in Saigon during

this entire time.

But Heath, I think, when Diem came back in early fall 1954, after the Geneva Accords, from France, from the U.S. really, via France, gave Diem adequate support. The policy shifted. I can't remember when Ambassador Heath departed, but policy-making gradually shifted to General Collins and his assistant Paul Sturm, who was in effect the political counselor.

Now you have a great change in the Embassy, when Freddy Reinhardt comes in mid-1955. His political counselor was Frank Meloy, who was subsequently assassinated in Beirut. The Office Director in EA changed from Bonsal to Ken Young. Here we have an entirely different cast of characters. These are committed to an independent South Vietnam, to the full support of Ngo Dinh Diem and to try their best "to build a nation". I have written at length on this and some of the errors that we may have made even in the very early period. But when you look at it in retrospect, the period from mid-'55 through '61, which is a fairly long period, more than 6 years, was probably the best period of our Vietnam involvement. The French war was over, the French departed, not right away but in due course -- by mid 1955 they were out and we were taking their place in terms of economic and military assistance. We started with minor military assistance, since the Geneva Accords barred any kind of direct military assistance. We were very cautious about the number of military advisers we had there. I became the Desk Officer in the fall of 1955. The most important thing I was involved in was the increase in the number of U.S. military advisers. They were doubled from the 385 or so that we had in place at the time of the Accords, which is what the Accords said could not be increased. In negotiations in 1956 by Dulles with Nehru, who was the Chairman of the International Control Commission, we were allowed to double the number. Part of the reason that Nehru was persuaded by Secretary Dulles to double the number was that there was a considerable fear in Congress that if our American equipment was left rotting in rice paddies, as it was, without the ability of Diem's side to gather it and use it effectively, the French would transport it during their evacuation to Algeria. This was considered undesirable in Congress and the Administration. We therefore figured out various ways to increase the number of our military advisers to keep this from happening.

Q: Were you involved in this? I want to keep this to your experiences.

KATTENBURG: Yes, I was deeply involved in this mission called the TERM, Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission. I created it, as a matter of fact, with the assistance and support of Frank Meloy, the Political Counselor in Saigon, and in a series of telegrams we set it up. I also supported and recommended greater assistance to Ngo Dinh Diem and the maintenance of the Landsdale Mission and of Wes Fishel of Michigan State, director of police training operations in Vietnam during that period.

Q: How did INR and the people around you view China? Did you see this as a monolith and that North Vietnam was part of this? And did you see that there were cracks that were coming?

KATTENBURG: Up until the time I left INR, even after that in my case, we were certainly more willing to consider cracks and to look, perhaps we were more open to another view of Ho Chi Minh, but it was remote given the firm hand the Secretary had on Vietnam and what was to be done and not to be done. Here you must remember that the Secretary [Dulles] created the

SEATO Pact in the Fall of 1954 as a way, really, of putting a better face on what had been in sheer power terms an American defeat along with the French at Dienbienphu and at the Geneva Accords, since we had been forced into some sort of negotiated agreement. Half of Vietnam was considered to be salvageable and the Secretary's policy on this was very firm. So the question of cracks and flexibility of this policy was really rather remote. I got my cue on it at the time that Gullion and I presented our long paper on what could be the consultations between the two zones. Dulles dismissed that, and decided he would do what Diem wanted -- there would be no consultations and no elections. That was, it seemed to me, a clear marching order and I have to put this in the context of the McCarthy period, of course. It undoubtedly had an impact. Those of us who were then working on East Asia matters were very conscious indeed of what had happened to some of our predecessors and...

KATTENBURG: The East Asia Bureau was headed by Averell Harriman when I entered the Seminar, but during the year he moved up to Under Secretary and was succeeded by Roger Hilsman. Roger Hilsman and I had gone to graduate school together and knew each other very well, so Roger thought I might replace Chalmers B. "Ben" Wood on the Vietnam Task Force. They wanted more control in the Bureau over the Task Force. Ben Wood was due for an assignment abroad and the job was vacant and I had Vietnam experience, although by that time it had been a number of years since I had been in it. I told Roger this and was rather reluctant. Then the scene changed again because Barney Koren, my former boss in Manila, entered the picture. [I want to put these things on record because I think they can show future historians that ultimately these personnel decisions are far more important than we give them credit, and are often the product of no systematic planning or thinking, but simply the result of personal politics or vendettas.] It turned out that there were two possible candidates for the Vietnam position to succeed Ben Wood in the summer of 1963, when I graduated from the Senior Seminar. One was Joe Mendenhall who had come out of the National War College at the same time. The other was myself, from the Senior Seminar. Koren and Mendenhall had apparently had a difficult personal relationship when they had both served in Bern, Switzerland. I don't know if the oral history project wants discussion...

Q: Oh sure, sure.

KATTENBURG: Barney did not want Mendenhall. He was now director of Southeast Asia under Hilsman and had been chafing at the independence of the Vietnam Task Force which had been moved out of the Bureau in 1961 and relocated on the 7th floor. He felt this was a golden opportunity to bring back some systematic Bureau control over this thing which had gotten out of hand, growing much too fast. He wanted me to work for him, in effect, even though it was called a task force for some reason. So I succumbed, I think clearly a character trait of weakness that I have had, that I easily said "yes" when felt needed or wanted by someone. I am a succumber type.

Q: But that was the Foreign Service attitude at least at the time -- you do what you were asked.

KATTENBURG: Well, I really didn't pay much attention to where I would come out in the

career. It didn't matter to me that much. I do know that he made quite a plea to get me. The director of the Seminar was Andrew Corry who thought I should be very careful. He thought it was a loser. But, of course, my sentiments were still very pro-Diem, pro- Vietnam. Diem was then in a very, very difficult situation because of the Buddhists burnings, a key moment in Vietnam.

July 1, 1963 was when my short leave ended, or June 25, something like that. In any event, I would like to call attention to a section in my book called, "The Vietnam Trauma In American Foreign Policy," published by Transaction, 1980 and reprinted in paperback in 1982 -- there will be a new edition sooner or later as it is out of print at this point. In it I have something called, "A Personal Note," in which I describe this particular difficult period leading up to the Diem coup. I came back, not only with an entirely new cast of characters, but not fresh on Vietnam having been away about 10 years -- from '56 to '63, not quite 10 years. The other thing that made it especially difficult was a new ambassador. Nolting was being pulled out and Henry Cabot Lodge had been appointed by President Kennedy as our new ambassador. We arrived on the desk, in effect, the same day. Koren had made clear to me that he did not have direct authority because it was still a task force. He had authority over me as a member of the Office of the Southeast Asian Affairs, or whatever it was called, in the Bureau but the Assistant Secretary really ran the Task Force. It was a matter of Hilsman, Forrestal in the White House, Mike Forrestal that is, myself and Lodge. I went through all the briefings in the White House and elsewhere with Lodge, which lasted until about the Fourth of July [I went on duty on June 25] and it was a very difficult time because the Buddhist situation was getting worse and worse. Then Wood briefed us, and the Pentagon. These briefings were with Lodge and his two henchmen, Fred Flott and Mike Dunn [Mike was essentially a military aide and bodyguard and Flott, a tough character, was a former Agency type who was also capable of wielding a pistol). We had established pretty good relations.

Anyway, I will never forget a moment, and this is absolutely true, in which Lodge went to my office in EA. My deputy was a man named Conlon, Dick Conlon, who you may have known. I was unfortunate in having one of the few bad secretaries in the Foreign Service. Not only was she nasty, she wasn't interested in doing any work. I was overwhelmed with problems. Lodge walked in and threw a pencil across my desk, right to my face. He said, "Who is going to politic my nomination through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee while I am up in Boston over the weekend and a few days afterwards?" And I said, "Please, don't worry, Mr. Ambassador, we will get it through." So this is my opportunity to thank Skip White, who was then the Congressional Liaison, for enormous help because we worked all weekend to persuade the Chairman to schedule hearings and to put Lodge ahead of Admiral Anderson who had been appointed Ambassador to Portugal and who was controversial and therefore was delaying the hearings. We got Lodge in, and when he came back the next Wednesday or Thursday, and found out that his hearing was scheduled for the following Monday, I could do no wrong by Lodge. I was made!

Anyway, Mendenhall really should have taken this job because he had, even though he couldn't get along with Koren, he had a much tougher and gung ho attitude on the whole Vietnam involvement than I did at this point. Looking at it from the briefings and thinking about it a little bit, even without going to Vietnam, I was not very optimistic as to the future prospects of

President Diem and very weary of any further direct American involvement than we already had. But I made Roger promise me that I could go as soon as possible to see the place. He did promise. On July 20 there was a meeting in Honolulu that Lodge, Roger and I attended, after which Lodge was going to take a very long, slow trip through the Far East to show his displeasure with Diem and arrive as late as possible to present credentials.

Q: This displeasure was because of the Buddhists...

KATTENBURG: Correct.

Q: ...burnings and repression. And his brother...

KATTENBURG: And his brother. Exactly. It was decided at this meeting in Honolulu that Kattenburg, having known Diem and been in part responsible for his being in office earlier, would go to talk to him -- "hold his hand" it was put to me by Roger. When I arrived in Saigon, Nolting, of course, was long gone on home leave, and Bill Trueheart, a wonderful guy with whom I had the best of relations always, had taken over as Chargé. Trueheart was just as analytically aware of the dangers and difficulties of the situation as I tended to be, and Nolting felt betrayed by Trueheart -- a sad story, as they were very close friends. After a few conversations with some of my older contacts, including Vu Van Hai, the Chef de Cabinet to Diem, who had been with him in 1954 when he first came back and had been with him when he visited the U.S. and we had gotten him an appointment with Bonsal back in '53, Jack Lydman and I. Vu Van Hai told me "sauvez le patron!", by which he meant get Ngo Dinh Nhu, his brother, out of here by whatever means and get the woman out, Madame Nhu. When I came back to Washington I spent a lot of time trying to cook up this trip for Madame Nhu, which she eventually took, around the U.S., so she was away during the coup. Lodge arrived in Saigon a week before I left. There is on record in the Department a telegram that I sent of a conversation that I had with Diem shortly after Lodge had arrived and just before I left and just before Lodge presented his credentials. It is a long telegram. I have never made a request under the Freedom of Information Act, and I don't know if it has been included in the Vietnam FRUS (Foreign Relations of U.S.) volume. Anyway, it was one in which I was very pessimistic as to the prospects unless we got rid of the Nhus. Then I came back to Washington and found two difficult situations. On the one hand Mendenhall, who had obtained the job of Deputy Director of Regional Affairs in EA, to Dick Usher, was very gung ho and very much in favor of going ahead with the war effort without much consideration of the politics of it. But he wasn't the real problem. In Defense, however, and this I regret to say was Bill Bundy who was Assistant Secretary for ISA...

Q: This was the Department of Defense?

KATTENBURG: In Defense. He hadn't moved over to State yet. Defense was so number conscious and so technocratically oriented to management and to all this nonsense without thinking through the "whys" and the "whats" of things, that we had a fairly difficult time. I think he maneuvered to isolate me somewhat and I wasn't beyond being removed somewhere.

What I worked on during the next two months mainly was with Bob Barnett, who was the EA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, on what was called salami slicing tactics, a term taken from the Berlin Crisis, and imposed on Diem, that is, a slow cutting off of aid to his special forces. Anyway, we were well clued in that the coup was coming. I believe it is still correct to say that we climatized the coup, we did not make the coup. The coup eventually occurred and then Roger...

Q: This was October, 1963?

KATTENBURG: November 1, 1963. Roger and Barney agreed to my going back and taking a real look at the war. I came back just before New Year and wrote a very pessimistic report which is buried somewhere in the Pentagon. On January 4, 1964, and I am certain of the date, I talked to Roger -- how did I get to this one, I didn't explain the NSC meeting of August 31, 1963, but I will come back to it -- but Roger said to me the President has said if it is too hot in the kitchen, get out of it. Did I want to get out? I said, "Absolutely, I want to get out." The simplest way to get me out of it and to make a real change in policy and personnel was to bring Mendenhall down from RA and to put me in RA. And that was done.

Q: Regional Affairs in...

KATTENBURG: In EA. So I went to Regional Affairs in EA and took a distance from it and looked at other things...

Q: Was this mutually agreed because you were taking too pessimistic a view?

KATTENBURG: It was agreed that I wanted out.

Q: Did you want out or were they trying to get some true believers on board?

KATTENBURG: It may have been a matter of both. It is a very good point, but I was certainly taking too pessimistic an attitude. Roger felt his own position beginning to weaken somewhat with the true believers and I thought it was best for all to move. I certainly wanted out. After my two months in Vietnam I felt there was no way we would ever win the war or that Diem could ever win.

Q: When you went to Vietnam, this was after Diem was killed.

KATTENBURG: That's right.

Q: What sort of views were you getting and from where?

KATTENBURG: Mainly really from my own moving about. I went to every Corps area and talked to a lot of our military and I confirmed all my feelings that we were absolutely replaying the French war. We were just simply replaying it -- down to the minute details of the Beaugeste Forts that the Special Forces were manning along the Cambodian border.

Q: Some of them were the same forts. I know, I helicoptered over some of them.

KATTENBURG: Now, the other thing is a more complicated thing which requires more historical study than it has received up to now, and some of us take different viewpoints on this in the profession -- among academics who have studied this period. My firm opinion was from conversations with three people, Tran Van Dong, who was chief of staff, Big Minh himself, and most importantly the minister of foreign affairs, General Le Van Kim, that we were going towards an arrangement, they wanted an arrangement, and what's more it played within my own sense of what we ought to do. It is clear, I think, that Washington felt, probably rightly, and I agreed with this, that if we made an arrangement with the communists, if they made an arrangement, Le Van Kim made an arrangement, we would get a coalition government that would be gobbled up fairly quickly by the communists. I don't disagree with that but I don't think Kim and Big Minh or Dong really thought this would happen. I think they felt that they had a going concern to sell to the North Vietnamese, that they could make deals because of personal acquaintances. This is not to be confused by anybody who listens to this tape to the previous period in which Ngo Dinh Nhu before his assassination is alleged to have sought contacts with the communists. That, I've always felt, was pure and absolute bluff with the U.S. in order to try and get the U.S. to support him for fear that otherwise he might run to the communists. I don't think the communists would ever have responded, given their basically favorable position, despite their enormous sufferings and the demands put on them. They were basically in a favorable position until we entered with full ground forces. I don't think the communists would ever have deigned to even speak with Ngo Dinh Nhu or Diem, not to speak about making any kind of deal.

However, these generals were a different matter. They might have been believable. What's more, they had forged an alliance with the neutralist elements among the Buddhists groups. Some of the Bonzes that we regarded with suspicion...

Q: Bonzes being Buddhist priests.

KATTENBURG: Correct.

I think here we have a clear clash between the gung ho element on the U.S. side, including many in the Agency, but not everybody, and the more military oriented, more confrontationalist groups (a difficult thing to summarize in a few words), and those who had retained some vestige of knowledge of what diplomacy could accomplish if used properly. The great problem with post-war American foreign policy to me has been that we lost the diplomatic art in the interim pretty much to military confrontational thinking. We all had become political/military experts, but no one was about to do smart maneuvering. That is what you needed in this situation. And it is what I felt when I came back to Washington and that is also what I put in the report which is buried over in DOD; never saw the light of day.

Q: When you came back and talked about making an agreement, was this anathema to even mention this?

KATTENBURG: I think it was. Certainly anathema to ISA which was becoming more important

under Bill Bundy at that time. That is why when Bill Bundy came to State to take Roger Hilsman's place in March of 1964, I was immediately "exiled" out of the Bureau to Policy Planning.

Q: Was it your impression that with Bundy coming over from Defense the military solution took over?

KATTENBURG: Right. The only correction I make to that statement would be that it wasn't so much a military as what I would call a technocratic-managerial-McNamara attitude. One in which we thought we could win by systematic systems theory.

Q: What I remember is the village count. The whole approach of the body count.

KATTENBURG: That's right. That whole type of approach, rather than our more conventional State Department, diplomatic or political approach. Indeed, you are absolutely right. So we have a very clear change in attitude. Now there is some modification of it when Max Taylor becomes important in policy, but that was not until a few months later.

Q: But during this time were you feeling increasingly isolated?

KATTENBURG: In the Regional Affairs unit of the Bureau I was very isolated from the Vietnam policy thing, but at about this time, or not too long thereafter, Koren was moved from Southeast Asian Affairs [I can't remember when this happened] and replaced by Bill Trueheart, who had come back from Saigon. Then, in all honesty, I felt less isolated. Trueheart and I viewed the situation very similarly.

Stu, I think you ought to interview Robert H. Johnson, who was a member of the policy planning council for the Far East, who had come from the NSC staff some years previously. I think he shifted at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration to SP (Policy Planning Council). Walt Rostow had a good deal of confidence in Bob Johnson. Bob Johnson, too, was extremely dubious about the Vietnam effort. I think we ought to point out that at this time the emphasis changed more to whether or not we should bomb the North -- this became a key issue. Much more so than what should we do with the problem of Vietnam. We didn't review the stakes at this time. And that is one of the points I make in my book. I have a chapter called "Ten Key Decisions on Vietnam" in which I deplore that we didn't review the stakes at a number of times. And that was one of them.

I was in RA with Dick Usher who is a very decent guy, working on a variety of small problems, including the Philippines again, for a very short time until Bundy came -- March, April. Bundy got me out of the Bureau. Rostow agreed to take me on. I think there was an understanding that I would leave Vietnam alone.

Q: You went to Policy Planning.

KATTENBURG: Right. To write a policy planning paper on the Philippines.

Q: Before we leave Vietnam, there was one place where you said, "how did I get on this without talking about an NSC meeting..."

KATTENBURG: Right. In August of 1963, after Lodge had arrived in Saigon and finally presented credentials, which is the only time he saw Diem until the very last and futile meeting just before the coup. He never saw him in the interim.

Q: Was this Lodge?

KATTENBURG: Lodge. This was Lodge's policy clearly. More Lodge's than the State Department's. It was his way of handling -- keeping his distance.

Roger wanted to see me immediately after my return from Saigon August 30. I went to see him and at that point the question was whether the coup would take place immediately at the end of August, what we now call the abortive coup at the end of August 1963 had become red hot, and he said, "You had better be ready to go to an EXCOM meeting of the National Security Council." It was on August 31, 1963. It was at that meeting that I blurted out my dissent with the policy. I don't know if you recall this, but it has been written up ad nauseam. It is even in the Pentagon Papers, although I didn't know at the time that it would be recorded.

What happened was that everybody was at that meeting, except the President. Johnson was chairing it as Vice President. Rusk, McNamara, Forrestal, Hilsman, and Harriman were there. Max Taylor was there as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And a number of other famous people. This was the meeting in which I imprudently said that we ought to get out with honor. I used the term "with honor." It was clearly imprudent. As I have said in the personal note in my book that I drew attention to, the reason I did it was not so much out of analysis or out of substantive feeling that we could never achieve anything there, than it was out of being personally appalled after about an hour of discussion at the low quality of the discourse. That these people didn't know a damn thing about Vietnam. They really didn't. Now maybe I wasn't the greatest Vietnam expert in the world, I didn't speak Vietnamese, but I had been around the issue a long time. Although I hadn't served in the Embassy for a full tour, I had been on the Desk. I had lived the experience of the French war and its wrenching agonies. So it was more that, I think, than anything else.

Q: Did you feel there was a great deal of posturing?

KATTENBURG: Yes, there was. But at this particular meeting they just said -- you can read the account of the meeting, the account was written by "Brute" Krulak (Major General Krulak) of the Marine Corps, who unbeknownst to us (I don't think Roger knew it either, as the meeting was supposed to be totally off the record), was making notes for somebody, I don't know for whom. He was the SACSA, Special Assistant for Counter-insurgency and Special Activities.

Q: Was it before or after he had made his tour over there?

KATTENBURG: Oh, it was before the tour. Before he and Mendenhall went out. The President came back and said are you two guys certain you went to the same country. Krulak was certainly very gung ho. In '63 we probably weren't doing that much better than earlier. It seems to me that

the macho factor that prevailed in 1961 was extenuated somewhat because by this time in '63 Kennedy had already made his American University speech which as I look upon it now in retrospect strikes me as a very important policy statement. That is, I think Bobby and John Kennedy had decided after the Cuban Missile Crisis, this was in October 1962, to get closer to the Soviets and engage in some pre-detente diplomacy if possible. And that was what was implied in the American University speech in April, 1963. I think as we look at the history of the 20th century that speech will rise in significance. We kept up a very strong stand against Fidel, of course. We didn't change the Cuban policy. I don't want to ramble on. The point is that despite this in '63 we weren't ready to review the stakes in Vietnam, just as we weren't ready when I came back in '64.

I want to say here for the history of the State Department that we, as I put in my book and mentioned names there, that there were a number of very good people in State [I mean by good, not just able people but respectable people with credibility, more credibility than I probably had] who felt the same way -- that we were barking up the wrong tree. And of course as everybody knows the chief of those was George Ball who was the Deputy to Secretary Rusk. But I should mention some of those in that group so that they may become better known. George Springsteen, who was Ball's chief assistant in his office [sort of an in-box guy], was also of the same mind, probably because Ball felt that way. But Springsteen, I think, was extremely helpful in facilitating what I would call the State Department dissenter club's work. We essentially staffed-up many of the memos that Ball wrote. I don't want to take anything away from what Ball did, but we produced many papers and pieces of junk and memos and I know one paragraph in the July 15 memorandum to Johnson by Ball is verbatim something I wrote in a memo to George. So George convened this group that included Bill Trueheart, in particular. And Bob Johnson, and myself, and Carl Salans who was Deputy Legal Advisor [who later became a lawyer in Paris, but I don't know where he is now]. And I am now probably leaving out a number of important names...

Q: Well, you can add them.

KATTENBURG: Several of the people in INR, Alan Whiting, in particular. They were in essence dissenters to the general course we were taking and wanted to get it back on the political track.

Q: So you were with Policy Planning from '64 to early '65...

KATTENBURG: From early '64 to mid '65. And I was able during that time to work in this group of dissenters and ...

Q: One quick question. In this period, '64-'65, what was the role of Policy Planning as you saw it? You hear about Policy Planning under George Kennan and slightly thereafter under the Eisenhower Administration and then it almost disappears from one's radar. It is always there but how important is it?

KATTENBURG: Well, I think a lot of it always depends on the chairman. I think Walt Rostow

had credibility and a very strong, aggressive personality at that point and was able to assert some influence. I wouldn't say it was overwhelming. Now one of the reasons why I say that is because we did a study, done legitimately out of Policy Planning that was initiated, pushed and driven through by Robert H. Johnson, who I hope you will interview, on the potential impact of the consequences of bombing North Vietnam. First we considered tit-for-tat bombing, then retaliatory bombing on a more sustained basis, etc. and then outright bombing. This study took place in the spring of 1964 and even ran through the summer, I believe, and the results were contrary to what was wanted. It said bombing would have very few, if any, effects other than pushing the Vietnamese to invading the South massively with ground forces. That whole study which had a Pentagon and CIA participation was buried. I believe among others Dan Ellsberg worked on it but I can't recall for sure, although I know I met him during that time -- Bob Johnson would know.

Another study on the same subject took place under Bill Sullivan. Now Bill at that time was sitting in Harriman's office. When he came on board sometime early in '64, maybe even in '63 -- well, he had been at the Laos conference of '62 and I guess he had been with Harriman and stayed in his circle and became extremely important and influential in policy making on Indochina. I have the greatest admiration and respect for him and always have had. I like him personally, we have always been friends, although never very close friends -- I would say more acquaintances. I would go to see Bill whenever I felt I would not be imposing on him and talk about Vietnam. He would always say "You are premature," or "You are too soon, just wait, hold on." I will never forget that. Just hold it, it is going to go the way you think it should go. I wanted an agreement. But I could see that as time went on we would get less and less out of an agreement. Eventually we lose, in effect. Bill served Harriman as loyally as possible. He chaired another study on the consequences of bombing which was more acceptable.

Subsequently Bundy took all this paper with him to Camp David right after the elections of the Fall of 1964 and he came out with the famous options paper on Vietnam. Options A, B and C. I really think Bundy, too, had his doubts about the policy. And I believe, as I have indicated in my book, that McNaughton, who was over in the Pentagon and working for McNamara, replacing Bundy as Director of ISA, had even greater doubts than Bundy. He was beginning to impart these doubts to McNamara which eventually led to the McNamara dissent with the policy in the Fall of '67. That all culminates in the Tet offensive in '68 and the abdication speech by Johnson. There is no need to go into that here. But I did want to talk about the conditions under which I was reallocated into EA.

L. MICHAEL RIVES
Political Officer
Hanoi (1951-1952)

L. Michael Rives was born in New York City in 1921 and raised in New Jersey. After one year at Princeton, he joined the Marines and served until 1945. He graduated from Princeton in 1947 with a degree in French. He took the Foreign Service Exam on a whim and passed. He has also served in Germany, France, the

Congo, Burundi, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Canada. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 25, 1995.

Q: Then after this experience they wanted to put you in Asia again, I guess.

RIVES: Yes, in Hanoi.

Q: You were in Hanoi from 1952 until when?

RIVES: '53, I think it was. About a year.

Q: Would you describe Hanoi at that period?

RIVES: It was a city that was beginning to be under siege. There was actually no shelling as such. You could hear it all day and all night, and the French were gradually being beaten back. There, again, I was a junior officer, a junior Vice Consul. I was in charge of visas and that kind of thing. I also did reporting on the Chinese in North Vietnam. It was an attractive city, basically, like so many of the cities developed by the French. It had broad boulevards. The Consulate, I must say, was perfectly beautiful. We had one of the best houses in Hanoi, the ground floor being the Consulate itself, and myself and another vice consul occupied the top floor. It was really very pleasant.

Q: Who was the Consul?

RIVES: Paul Sturm.

Q: Did you have much contact with the French while you were there?

RIVES: Oh, we dealt almost entirely with the French, because they were really in control.

Q: How did they look on America at that time?

RIVES: Well, I think they were torn. We were supporting them quite strongly in those days, and so, obviously, they appreciated that, until we turned them down on Dien Bien Phu.

Q: The Korean War was going full force then, too.

RIVES: Yes, it was.

Q: Was there concern that the Chinese, having entered in the north, might also enter [the conflict in Vietnam?]

RIVES: Yes and no. I don't know if the French really worried about that much. I was fortunate enough, once, to take a trip to the last French outpost on the Chinese border. It really was fascinating, to sort of sneak up there at night, and then spend a day there. It was commanded by a Vietnamese colonel in the French army who was famous, because he was a real character. On

Sunday morning, we woke up to band music. We looked out and saw the regimental band playing light music, like waltzes and such, as they would have played in the nineteenth century in France. When he went out on patrol (he would always go out), he would fly his flag, and as he approached each Chinese post on the other side of the frontier, they would lower their flags in salute, because they knew who it was. In the end, they were beaten, but he was a real character.

Q: In your year in Hanoi, '53, did you have any contact with Vietnamese officials, or were there any Vietnamese officials?

RIVES: There were a few, but most of the Vietnamese I dealt with were people like our landlord.

Q: What was the general feeling in the Consulate concerning the Viet Minh? Who were they, and what did we think about them?

RIVES: We thought that everybody around us was Viet Minh, actually. We had a wonderful chef in our apartment over the Consulate. We also had a perfectly gorgeous Vietnamese girl who took care of us but who was married to a man we were all convinced was a Viet Minh. We had no proof of that.

Q: Were any Americans targets of the Viet Minh?

RIVES: No, not while I was there.

Q: Was Ho Chi Minh a person one thought about?

RIVES: Yes, but at that time, as far as I was concerned, we followed the line, which was that Ho Chi Minh was bad, etcetera, etcetera... I don't think we had realized yet that he was a communist but not a "real" communist, so to speak.

Q: Did you travel out in the countryside?

RIVES: Oh, you couldn't go out very far. Too dangerous. We used to go out and visit the occasional Foreign Legion post on the outskirts of town, things like that, but we'd have to be back in before dark.

Q: Did this make you feel, a bit, like you were under siege?

RIVES: Oh, yes. Definitely. Oh, yes.

Q: Where did you go to get out?

RIVES: We flew to Hong Kong, although Consul Sturm did not approve of anybody getting leave. In the year I got one brief weekend there.

Q: Good God! This was your first smaller post... How did Consul Sturm operate.

RIVES: He was a brilliant political officer, bilingual in French, but "...as an administrator...[he was] absolutely hopeless." I am quoting Ambassador Donald Heath's remarks on my efficiency report, which were very bad by Paul Sturm, but Mr. Heath saved me by that kind of remark.

Q: What was your impression of the French military?

RIVES: They were good. Just to meet them like that... I don't know what you'd call them, exactly, compared to the American military. I wouldn't have said they were as organized as we were. They were a really gung ho bunch, and actually, most of them in the Hanoi area that I met were professionals. I met the officers and, of course, the Foreign Legion, people like that. They had all sorts of odd people.

Q: What did we have in Hanoi... well, it would have to have been a Consulate at that time. Did we have anything in Saigon?

RIVES: Yes, there was a full embassy in Saigon which supervised all three countries, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Q: Did you go down there at all?

RIVES: Well, I stopped there on the way to Hanoi, but I didn't go back there again until I was transferred to Laos as Charge, and then I went back.

Q: Sounds like they really kept you trapped!

RIVES: Yes, pretty much.

Q: What were the visa matters.

RIVES: A few Vietnamese tried to go the U.S., occasionally, and some Chinese. But they'd have to have pretty legitimate reasons [to be approved] to go. A lot of them were trying to get out, you know, that kind of thing.

Q: Were there any Americans there who were having problems?

RIVES: I can't remember any Americans there except at the Consulate and the AID mission -- we had an AID officer -- but that was all.

SCOTT COHEN
Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) Officer
Saigon (1951-1953)

Scott Cohen was born in Boston. He joined the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS) in 1949 and served in Saigon (1951-1953). He then became an

assistant to Senator Charles Percy and served as a foreign affairs advisor to the senator when he was on the Foreign Relations Committee. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: You came into the FBIS in 1949. I would like to focus on your experience. You went to Saigon in 1951.

COHEN: Yes, I arrived there the first week of February 1951 to complete a negotiation with the French High Command and the Vietnamese Army for a joint radio monitoring operation out of a suburb of Saigon. That was quickly concluded, and I think we were reporting as soon as the second or third week, maybe the third week in February 1951, by radio teletype to Washington.

Q: What was your impression of Saigon? This was '51. What was the situation there?

COHEN: Saigon then was a beautiful French provincial town with an educated middle class, a very attractive people, who, to a large extent, were fascinated with the French way of life and adopted much of French style and culture. Next to Saigon was the city of Cholon with half a million Chinese who maintained their own culture and seemed less interested in French culture.

The political situation, it was the time of the Bao Dai experiment when Bao Dai was named emperor of Vietnam, largely due to American pressure on the French to establish some Vietnamese government that had a semblance of credibility and integrity. But, in fact, he was a puppet of the French. And in his ministries, there were installed Vietnamese at the top level and beside them French advisors, who, to a great extent, ran those ministries. They had more experience, but that's not why they were running them. They were running them because France was in charge. It was called the Union of Associated States of Indochina, which included Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. There was clear French control, and the French were also training, under Bao Dai, a Vietnamese army of indifferent quality.

Q: If you had to deal with any problems, did you go to the Vietnamese or to the French?

COHEN: I had counterparts in the monitoring business, a French commandant whose name was Besnier, a very impressive man in the French High Command -- I guess that's the rank of major in our army -- and a Vietnamese colonel representing the Vietnamese Army. I had the smoothest of relations with them. And when there were difficulties, I could meet with them and resolve the difficulties very easily. We had a similar goal: to find out what the dissident radio stations were broadcasting. And there were many. It wasn't just the Viet Minh at that time. Even the Cao Dai had a radio station.

Q: Cao Dai being sort of a religious sect, weren't they?

COHEN: A religious and political sect. I knew their Pope who had a spiritual bent and an army of ten thousand, a very interesting man, and some day I'd like to tell the story of the Cao Dai. I got to know him on a very personal basis and went to Tay-Ninh, his capital, forty miles from Saigon, many times. But there was also a Buddhist sect with a radio station. I suppose, at any given time, there were about ten to fifteen different authorities broadcasting in Vietnam, and

what they were saying was important to us.

Q: Were we only listening there to monitor them, or were we using it also as a monitoring station for other areas, too?

COHEN: We were interested only in Indochina. There was a larger monitoring station in the Pacific which listened to China.

Q: I see. You came back to Washington in 1952?

RICHARD C. MATHERON
Special Technical and Economic Mission
Saigon (1951-1953)

Special Technical and Economic Mission
Hue (1953-1956)

Richard C. Matheron was born in California in 1927. He joined ECA in 1949 and in 1956 became a Foreign Service Officer serving in France, Vietnam, Italy, Nigeria, Cameroon, Upper Volta, Madagascar, and was ambassador to Swaziland. He was interviewed by Lee Cotterman in 1989.

MATHERON: After being in Paris for two years as a records and communications person, I wanted to get into more substantive work. I was able to get an assignment to the Special Technical and Economic Mission in Saigon, which was opened there in 1951. Robert Blum was the first mission chief. I spent from 1951 to 1957 in Vietnam, of course with home leave and other trips outside the country.

It was particularly when I was assigned to Hue in 1953 as the only American official in Central Vietnam that I got interested in political work. My responsibilities had to do with economic development, but every time I went to Saigon, I was invited over to the embassy to chat with the ambassador and DCM about developments in Hue, which was the former imperial capital, where there were still members of the royal family.

Q: Was that Ambassador Heath, sir?

MATHERON: That was Ambassador Heath. Ed Gullion was DCM, followed by -- all of a sudden his name escapes me, [later Ambassador Matheron recalled it was Robert (Rob) McClintock], and I'm really embarrassed, because he is one of the people who most inspired me. Pat Byrne was at the embassy at that time. I think you were there yourself about that time.

Q: Yes, I was. I left in about October 1953 for an administrative position in the embassy, where I'd been for two years, just before Dienbienphu, as a matter of fact.

MATHERON: I was in Hue at the time of Dienbienphu, when all the French troops were taken out of Hue. I remember that the embassy thought that we ought to completely close down our operation in Hue, but I was able to prevail upon the ambassador to let us go back. There were two of us. Because we had the assurances of the French general that if he had to evacuate, he would take us with him. I thought that the Vietnamese were looking so carefully at what we were doing that it would cause panic if we pulled out first. They thought that even though I was the economic mission person, I must be wired into the White House directly. They almost used to camp on the doorstep to see whether we were going to stay in the area.

Anyway, the point I was trying to make was that because of the encouragement of friends from the embassy, I really thought that I wanted a career as a Foreign Service officer. Another person who encouraged me to take the Foreign Service exam was John Gunther Dean, who was also in the economic mission at that time, and who was just about ready to become a Foreign Service officer himself. He has gone on to a fantastic career. I think he's had at least five different ambassadorships in the last few years.

But to make a long story short, I took the written examination at the embassy in 1955, and passed the exam, much to my surprise. In 1956, I took my oral exam in the ambassador's office. Reinhardt was ambassador at that time, and it was he and Mack Godley, who was chargé d'affaires in Cambodia, and another man, later recalled to be Consul General in Singapore, "Durby" Durbrow, as chairman. I took the exam in Saigon. Those were the old days when they asked you to sit outside while they deliberated on whether you had passed or not. I went outside.

Q: And nervously sat there outside.

MATHERON: Sat outside for about half an hour or 45 minutes. I'd been asked one question to which the chairman of the board had said I was dead wrong in my answer, and I was quite convinced I was right. I had said that the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in 1882. Chairman Durbrow insisted it was much later. I didn't know whether he was testing me for my knowledge or whether he was testing my willingness to stand up and defend a position, but I defended it. I was very happy there was an Encyclopedia Britannica in the ambassador's outer office, and so while these gentlemen were deliberating, I looked up my question and knew I was right. I was practically holding it in my hand, ready to defend my position again if he'd come out and said I hadn't passed the exam. But when he came out and shook my hand and congratulated me on passing it, I didn't press the issue any further.

I then left what was not yet AID, I think it was called MSA in those days or United States Operations Mission, and became a full-fledged Foreign Service officer in May of 1957, when I went to the A-100 course. My first assignment as an FSO was in Rome as commercial officer.

BERTHA POTTS
Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS
Saigon (1952-1954)

Bertha Potts was born in California in 1915. After receiving her degree from San Jose State College, she became a member of the WACS. Her career has included positions in Bangkok, Saigon, Lyon, Algiers, Vientiane, and Rabat. Ms. Potts was interviewed by Howell S. Teeple on February 19, 1999.

POTTS: Just two years. Then I got the orders to Saigon.

Q: Did you still remember your 100 hours of Berlitz French?

POTTS: I had to do a little review which I did in Redwood City on home leave with my mother. I found a student at Stanford University who helped me.

Q: This was 1952 or 1953?

POTTS: This was 1952. I spent 1952-54 in Saigon.

Q: Again as a cultural officer?

POTTS: Yes.

Q: This was before any real buildup of our forces in Vietnam.

POTTS: Oh, yes. We were not involved at all.

Q: But it was at the time of the French debacle there.

POTTS: Yes, and I was there at the time of Dien Bien Phu. I was there the day we were all assigned to go down to the docks where people were coming off ships, the great exodus from the north. We were given tins of milk to hand to the people and were asked to give them only to the elderly, pregnant women or little children.

Q: These were Vietnamese refugees from the north?

POTTS: Yes. They were so afraid of us that they wouldn't even take the milk. They thought we were going to poison them.

Q: Did they think you were French?

POTTS: No, they thought from their experience in the north that we were going to poison them.

WILLIAM J. CUNNINGHAM
General Services Assistant
Saigon (1952-1954)

William J. Cunningham was born in Santa Monica, California in 1926 and educated at the University of New Mexico. He entered the Foreign Service in 1949. His career included posts in Prague, Seoul, Tokyo, Saigon, Sapporo, Phnom Penh and Taipei. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

CUNNINGHAM: The upshot of all of this was that by 1952 the eligibility on the written examination had expired. I had to go to square one and start all over again because I didn't have enough French to meet the language requirement. I didn't have enough Spanish either though I had studied Spanish at the University of New Mexico. My French by this time was better than my Spanish so I decided that I had better emphasize that. When I got to Washington in the summer of 1952 and went into Foreign Service personnel in the Department, I said, "I want to pass the Foreign Service examination but I need a language to do it. French is the one I am working on and I don't want to leave Asia." They said, "Great, we will send you to Saigon." So I went to Saigon in September of 1952.

Q: *How long were you there?*

CUNNINGHAM: I was assigned there until November of 1954.

Q: *How long were you actually there?*

CUNNINGHAM: I was there all that time – 26 months. The reason I say assigned there was because from July of 1954 to November of 1954 I was working half time in each of two posts - - in Phnom Penh and in Saigon. Again I was in an administrative capacity. When I arrived in Saigon I was assigned as a general services assistant so I was taking care of property, effects, shipping, all kinds of stuff like that, the usual general services work. It was a very large establishment that we had there. We had something like 20 or 25 residences and a couple of apartment buildings.

In the spring of 1954 the final military defeat of the French occurred at Dien Bien Phu and the five powers - Russia, the U.S., Britain, France and China - were convening in Geneva again to try to sort out the Asian situation in the wake of the Korean War which had concluded the previous summer in 1953 with the armistice agreement. They reached an agreement on Indochina. The deal was that the French would get out and that the three Indochina states would become fully independent sovereign countries. Up to that time they had been known as the Associated States of the French Commonwealth, or something like that.

The American ambassador in Saigon, Donald Heath, was accredited also to the governments of Laos and Cambodia. With the entry into force of the Geneva accords on the first of July 1954, U.S. diplomatic representation in Vientiane and Phnom Penh was to be raised to full diplomatic status and we were to have a resident ambassador in each of those posts rather than a chargé d'affaires.

The embassy in Cambodia on the first of July or the 30th of June, 1954 consisted of a chargé d'affaires, Joseph Montllor, a code clerk, another guy who was ostensibly an embassy staffer but was actually the CIA station chief though a very junior one, an AID representative, and a USIS

officer. There were five Americans in the American country team in Cambodia at that time. All of this was going to change and a full embassy was going to be instituted there.

Robert McClintock, who was deputy chief of mission in Saigon at this time, was designated to be the first resident American ambassador in Phnom Penh. He had become aware of my work in the general services section of the American embassy and he said, "I know whom I want as my administrative officer. I want Bill Cunningham," who was at this time an FSS-11. I think I had lost the temporary ten and had fallen back to an 11. He asked me if I would like to do it and I said, "Sure." I felt confident that I could do it.

Off I went at the beginning of July to Phnom Penh. We used to have the CIA airline, Civil Air Transport or CAT, as it was known, which operated throughout Asia and it had a regular flight twice a week up to Phnom Penh. What I used to do was catch a plane Monday morning and fly up to Phnom Penh, work there until Thursday at noon, and catch the afternoon flight back to Saigon. Because I had no replacement in Saigon and they couldn't release me, I would work my job in Saigon Thursday evening, Friday, Saturday, and a good part of Sunday, then I would take off again on Monday morning to Phnom Penh to help them with their administrative work there. That was a real adventure.

The American embassy up until the first of July 1954 had been located on the second floor of a little downtown building in Phnom Penh not far from the banks of the Tonle Sap, which flows into the Mekong a few miles farther south. The office was over the top of a pepper shop that was owned by a French colonial woman, and the building faced the broad, tree-lined mall, which ran from the front of the railway station a kilometer away right down to the Tonle Sap. She had been there for a long time and her husband started a pepper plantation. He died and she was a widow and she was selling pepper. She was a rather difficult person. There was no way that we could expand there and we had to find someplace else to put the embassy.

There was a building under construction elsewhere in Phnom Penh being erected by a Sino-Cambodian businessman. Montllor had thought of that building and said that would make a great building for our American diplomatic establishment that was going to be set up there. "But," he said, "it is only a two story building. If we could get him to add two floors to the building it will work and we will have enough space." I got a hold of the architect who was a Frenchman. He had designed the building and I talked with him. He said, "Yes, this foundation is strong enough and we can put two more floors on top of the building."

We then got in the midst of a very complicated deal to figure out how we were going to get these two floors added to this building and get it done in time to be able to accommodate the growing staff. People were already beginning to come up from Saigon and elsewhere to report in. We had to find some kind of office space for them because this space over the top of the pepper shop was not going to be adequate.

There was a lot of AID counterpart money around at that point. I can't remember all the particulars now but I became deeply involved with negotiations with the Sino-Cambodian businessman, the architect, and the AID comptroller to figure out some way whereby we could front money for the construction of the building and then credit that against the eventual lease

payments that we would make to this businessman. We worked out a deal, and work began on the building with a total of four floors, configured to requirements of the Embassy. I managed to get this worked out about September or October.

Meantime, the U.S. official establishment was growing and I had to find temporary office space, so I started looking around town. Somebody said there was an abandoned Masonic lodge in the other part of town that would make pretty good temporary quarters for us. I went and looked it over, and negotiated a lease on that.

Now this Masonic lodge was a very substantial large two-story building and it was built in the colonial style, which is to say with 15 foot ceilings and very large windows that were closed by shutters. There were no glass windows in it, and there was no way of cutting off the outside air. You couldn't air condition the building without installing glass windows. That would be too expensive of a job to do, particularly since it was temporary space. What I had to do was get ceiling fans installed in the building and somehow or other make it comfortable. McClintock was very good about this.

The fortunate thing was that we moved in there in I think September of 1954 and about that time of the year the humidity begins to decline in Cambodia, and the weather becomes cooler. It becomes bearable, if you have a ceiling fan and dress informally. I had spent enough time up in Cambodia seeing friends over the previous two years that I knew that would work. My gambit was to get everybody into the old Masonic lodge over the cool months and get the four-story embassy building completed before the monsoon hit in April. In late March, early April, it really starts to heat up. By the middle of April you are just praying for the first rain in Cambodia to cool things off.

That year I worked harder than I think I have ever worked almost any other time in my life. I was working two jobs up until November. Finally a replacement for me in Saigon arrived in November and I was then able to move full time up to Cambodia and act as the administrative officer there.

Q: I would like to go back to your arrival now and then we will pick up Cambodia again. I would like to go back to September of '52 when you arrived. Who was ambassador? Can you sort of describe the atmosphere in Saigon at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: Donald Heath was ambassador to the three Associated States of Indochina - - Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, resident in Saigon at that time. This war had been going on by then almost six years since the collapse of the negotiations between the French and Ho Chi Minh. The French were not making it; it was quite obvious.

It was not safe to travel in the countryside. In fact shortly before I arrived in Saigon two American women on the staff of the Embassy had been shot on the golf course, which was just on the outskirts of Saigon, by the guerillas. Whenever you went into a movie theater in Saigon in those days you were shaken down because it used to be a habit of the Viet Minh to go into the movies, carry a bomb in, and roll it down under the seats so that it would go off in the front of the movie theater. That had happened a few times. On rue Catinat (later Tu Do), here was a little

hill that went down towards the Saigon River with open-air French style cafes on both sides. Viet Minh sympathizers or agents would sometimes ride by in cycloporesses and throw a bomb into the cafes as they went through. There were no incidents of this kind as I recall during the time that I was in Saigon but there had been earlier on and there were precautions of various kinds.

You could not travel outside of the city safely. You could go up to Dalat, which was the hill station, but you had to go by military convoy and they only went twice a week. I made that trip a couple of times. Sometimes it was safe to travel to Cap St. Jacques, now called Vung Tau, which was the beach resort down at the mouth of the Saigon River. In general the government... (end of tape)

Q: You were saying there were times you could travel?

CUNNINGHAM: Yes, we could travel safely to other parts of South Vietnam at times, and other times you could not. I would say about half the time I was there, it was not safe to travel outside of the city of Saigon except in military convoy and even in some cases military convoys were not safe and were brought under attack.

The French were very suspicious of our involvement in Vietnam. They felt we were trying to take over their colony for them, or in some way evict them from Vietnam. We were trying to assure them that we were not interested in displacing them, but we felt it was necessary to give the South Vietnamese more independence, more latitude, in order to be more willing to support the war against the Viet Minh. That was generally the atmosphere as I recall it at that time.

Q: Before the Geneva accords in '54, what was the situation? In '52 was all of Vietnam a French colony or did we have a real embassy there?

CUNNINGHAM: We had a real embassy in Saigon, yes, and a consul general in Hanoi. That embassy had been established in about 1950 at which time the French had changed the relationship of Vietnam to France to something like a commonwealth country. Bao Dai was on the throne still as the "emperor" of Vietnam, but there was a French governor general and the French had very strong influence over the governing of Vietnam. There was a civil Vietnamese Government, with a President, Vice President and legislature. Vietnam, however, was not a truly independent country and my impression was it was not even as independent as Canada was at the time. For example, the Vietnamese piaster was linked to the French franc and the French set the exchange rate for the piaster. The Vietnamese did not have independent control of the value of their own currency. There was the same kind of thing as the British practice, commonwealth preference, so far as the importation and exportation of goods from Vietnam was concerned. It was part of the Franc bloc and it was a possession of the French.

There were about 250,000 troops engaged in the military effort against the Viet Minh at the time. It was a combination of French troops, French colonials from Senegal, Algeria, and other places in the French empire, and Vietnamese troops. There was not an independent Vietnamese army. The army of Vietnam was established about 1953 when de Lattre de Tassigny came out and established the first battalion of an independent army of the Republic of Vietnam. Prior to that time all of the Vietnamese troops were simply troops in the French armed forces fighting against

the Viet Minh. It was not a fully sovereign country. It had limited self-rule within the French Commonwealth.

Cambodia was a little bit more independent. It was a protectorate of France and the French were responsible for defense and foreign relations, and the Cambodians were responsible for internal administration but always under the direction of a French prefect. The same was pretty much true of Laos, also.

Q: What was the attitude of the staff of the American embassy in Saigon towards the French at that time?

CUNNINGHAM: I'm trying to think back now to this. We were really walking a bit of a tightrope there. On the one hand we were trying to maintain a cordial relationship with the French and persuade them that it was our intention to support their defense of Vietnam against communist aggression. At the same time I think we were growing more and more aware of the importance of nationalism as an element in the political situation in Vietnam, and we were trying to cultivate some good will I suppose with the Vietnamese. That's about as closely as I can characterize it at the time.

Q: I was just wondering whether it was one of these things where we were sort of thinking of the French as not really doing things very well and we could do it better and all of that?

CUNNINGHAM: Well there was a certain amount of that, certainly, so far as the prosecution of the war was concerned, and a lot of criticism of the French conduct of the military campaign, particularly that they were conducting it as a colonial war rather than as a war for the sovereign integrity of Vietnam as a sovereign country entitled to self-rule. We thought they ought to give the Vietnamese a little more latitude.

Q: What about the events leading up to and including the end of that at Dien Bien Phu, which really started at the beginning of 1954? What was our reaction to that?

CUNNINGHAM: As I recall, the Americans were just as much taken by surprise by the way Dien Bien Phu turned out as the French were. I don't recall that there was that much skepticism on the part of the Americans, particularly the military advisors there. I could be mistaken on this but I don't recall that the Americans were advising the French not to concentrate their forces in Dien Bien Phu. It was quite evident by the time that the French elected this strategy, that the French war against the Viet Minh was not succeeding and that the Viet Minh were gradually gaining, and gaining, and gaining. Something had to be done. The French elected to concentrate a very large force at Dien Bien Phu. I don't think that the Americans advised them against it, that is not my impression.

Of course for a time the French concentrated forces up there and everything seemed to be going well. At first they were not being brought under attack. What no one expected was that the Viet Minh would be able to lug, and actually would lug, artillery over the mountainous terrain and set it up on the perimeter around the valley. I do recall at the time somebody saying – I think it was one of the military groups there – that the French didn't think they needed to take the high

ground. Of course now they were being finished off like fish in a barrel.

Q: What about social life there? Were the Vietnamese included in the social life or was it pretty much with the French?

CUNNINGHAM: A lot of it was with the French and what social life there was involving the Vietnamese I think was to some extent... There were some people in the embassy now who worked very hard at cultivating the Vietnamese. What you have to understand is we had no Vietnamese language officers in the embassy at that time. All conversation with the Vietnamese was conducted in French. Therefore you had contact only with Vietnamese who spoke English or French. If you had contact with a Vietnamese who spoke neither English nor French, it was via an interpreter and it was English to French to Vietnamese most typically. There were very few people who could interpret between English and Vietnamese. A few of my Vietnamese staff in the embassy, for example, spoke English but there were only two whom I relied upon to serve as interpreters to Vietnamese contractors, vendors, and so forth, who I dealt with in the general services office.

Q: Was there any concern about penetration of our embassy by the Viet Minh?

CUNNINGHAM: Not that I recall, no. We did not feel particularly vulnerable in that respect. The French were the ones who were the objects of antagonism for the Vietnamese and I don't recall that we necessarily felt vulnerable to the Viet Minh.

Q: Was there any concern as Dien Bien Phu was really going through its last agony that we might intervene? I know the French were trying to get us to intervene and it was being considered back in Washington. I was wondering what the attitude was in Vietnam?

CUNNINGHAM: I think the attitude in Saigon at that point was that it was hopeless. Dien Bien Phu was gone. It was over with. It was finished. You see one thing that happened was, during the period of Dien Bien Phu I remember very clearly one morning while the final battles were going on over there we were all awoken by a huge explosion about 4:00 in the morning. The Viet Minh sappers had gotten through the perimeter and blown up the P.O.L. dump, which was out in one part of town. Then about a half-hour to 45 minutes later there was another huge explosion. This one was closer in, and it was the French army's ammo dump.

So here at a time when the French army was fighting for its life in Dien Bien Phu the sappers had blown up the P.O.L. supply and blown up the ammo dump in Saigon. That convinced everybody in the establishment, I think, that it was over with. If the French could not protect their main stronghold in South Vietnam at a time when their army was under attack and fighting for its life in the north, they were not going to be able to hold onto Vietnam; that was the end of it. Of course the negotiations at this time were beginning to pick up in Geneva, so the handwriting on the wall was very clear. Everybody knew that it was over at that point.

Those two explosions by the way broke windows in the ambassador's residence and I had to get busy the next morning. As a matter of fact what made McClintock pick me out a few weeks later to be his Administrative Officer in Phnom Penh was that I got the windows in his residence fixed

very quickly. That's how I got my job in Cambodia. It was truly an extraordinary opportunity. I was an FSS-11 or maybe an FSS-10 at the time. I had a minor supervisory position. I had no training in fiscal or personnel management, which are major responsibilities of an administrative officer. I did like managing things and getting difficult jobs done. And I was still single, mobile, young, and adventurous.

Q: Such are Foreign Service careers made.

CUNNINGHAM: That's right.

Q: Coming back to Phnom Penh...

CUNNINGHAM: There are a couple of more things that I would like to say about Saigon before we leave it, and again it is sort of a personal reflection on it. Once the Geneva accords were agreed to, 90 days was allowed for people to evacuate from the north to the south, and of course the French also were given 90 days to get their troops out.

There were three things that I remember very clearly about this period. One was the speed with which the French pulled out. They pulled out so fast that we actually began to protest that they were leaving too quickly and they were going to cause the collapse of Vietnam particularly by departing so quickly. I think all the French troops were out within 60 days rather than 90. They were not interested in staying any longer at all.

The second thing is the arrival of Ngo Dinh Diem. I remember very clearly the day that he arrived; it was in early July of 1954. It was the first time in my life that I saw spontaneous demonstrations in the streets of Saigon or almost anywhere. There weren't a lot of people that came out but people did come out and I remember that there was sort of a spontaneity and optimism about his arrival and the welcome that he was given at that time.

The third thing that I remember is the evacuation of refugees from North Vietnam. There was a huge stream of them. There was an airlift almost constantly from North Vietnam into Ton Son Nhut airport. I was out at the airport frequently on other business and every time I went out there, there were transport planes of all descriptions, one after another, landing and discharging North Vietnamese refugees. This was a major airlift, with planes of all descriptions landing one after the other. Again I remember these people coming off of those planes and having a dazed look about them. These were people who had been uprooted from their ancestral villages where their families had lived for generations and they were brought into a strange land. Their dress was different. Their language was different. They didn't know where they were. It was really a very moving and pathetic sight.

Not only that, I remember very well the transport ships. American military transports were finally pressed into service to help evacuate North Vietnamese from North Vietnam to South Vietnam within the 90-day period, and they were jammed. Those ships were pulling up in the Saigon River right across the street from the Majestic Hotel at the foot of Rue Catinat, or Tu Do as it was later called, and there were people all over the decks; they were burdened with people. A lot of them were people who were not allowed to leave their villages and go to the evacuation ports. They had actually launched themselves into the sea on whatever kind of craft, or even just

a floating piece of wood that they could get, to get out into the shipping lanes and be picked up by ships that were coming south.

There were several hundred thousands who evacuated in that period to South Vietnam. That left a very deep impression on me. Within five years I had seen people fleeing tyranny in three different countries, in two different parts of the world, and those are indelible memories that I just can't forget. I think they have to be part of the record nowadays. Those of us who remember have to let others know what the experiences were like. Anyway, that's pretty much it for Saigon.

HOWARD R. SIMPSON
Press Officer
Saigon (1952-1955)

Information Officer
Saigon (1964-1965)

Howard R. Simpson was born in 1925 and raised in Alameda, California. In 1943, he was drafted into the Army and served three dutiful campaigns in the European Theater. He returned to the United States in 1945, and, under the influence of the GI Bill, continued his educational ambitions in San Francisco and later in Paris. Simpson joined the Foreign Service in 1951, where he served in Vietnam, Nigeria, France, and Algeria. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 10th, 1994.

SIMPSON: Well, my first assignment was Saigon and I was assigned to Saigon as an information clerk.

Q: *This was in '51?*

SIMPSON: This is in '51 as an information clerk. I got there in '52 after the Washington training. And I arrived there and Lee Brady was the Public Affairs Officer and I was immediately caught up in this thing. The Foreign Service in those days was a little different. There were a lot of opportunities. It wasn't so stratified. And within a very short time I found myself Assistant Press Officer and then a short time later Embassy Press Officer. And with that situation in Indochina during the war. The French war. It meant that I was also assigned later as Official War Correspondent to the French, Franco-Vietnamese forces, fighting the Viet Minh at the time.

Q: *I just want to nail down the dates, you came into the State Department in '51 and you went almost out immediately to Saigon. So you were there from '52 until...?*

SIMPSON: I was there from '52 until '55.

Q: *'55 okay. When you got to Saigon, in the first place, was our Embassy in Saigon? What did we*

have in Hanoi?

SIMPSON: We had a consulate in Hanoi and we had, when I first got to Saigon, it was an Embassy but it had been a Legation before that. But it had become an Embassy that was serving the Associated States of Indochina -- Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Ambassador Donald Heath was the man in place at the time and there was the USIS organization as far as information. And the American Aid Mission had a big information operation and there was quite a bit of duplication, a little rivalry because they had all the money.

Q: *Oh yes.*

SIMPSON: And it was finally pulled together. It finally worked out all right. But it was a very colorful time. I mean Saigon in those days was a -- you could say it was a bachelor's dream. It was sort of a Terry and the Pirates atmosphere, good food, good drink, the war at your doorstep. Strange things going on all over and you learned very fast the realities of intrigue and the variations of shades of grey.

Q: *The war at that point was with the Viet Minh.*

SIMPSON: That's right.

Q: *And was this down in the Saigon area as well as up in the delta area, the Red River area?*

SIMPSON: The fighting in the North was more structured, it was, Giap had produced and brought out his divisions and the Delta French had a lot of severe blows up there, they were struggling to contain. At the same time the war was going on in the South, more in a guerrilla mode with the railroads being blown up and land mines on the roads. Saigon closed down, I mean the roads were closed at about 5 o'clock and you couldn't travel on them, any roads leading out of Saigon, going or coming, you couldn't move. And the villages were all sort of buttoned down at a certain hour. Pillboxes and all that sort of thing, so the war was in the South as well as in the North but it was more guerrilla sporadic in the South.

Q: *What were your impressions of the Embassy during this period. In the first place how did Donald Heath operate?*

SIMPSON: Well I think that, looking back on it, I think it operated pretty well considering that it was a comparatively small Embassy to cover such a big spread of territory. Heath was a professional with a wry sense of humor and a great temper that didn't usually show itself unless he was provoked. He also wore a broad brimmed fedora all the time which was sort of his mark and we, the young Turks of the Embassy, sometimes accused him of being too conservative and following the French line. But I don't think we were aware at that time, one of our big objectives was to keep France active in NATO and on-the-line in Europe and that any slight problem in Indochina would reflect there too. The French were just beginning to tire of that whole war out there and they had lost a lot of people. And we were moving in to pay for a lot of it. So the Embassy was busy in a reporting mode in the field as well as in Saigon, politicians and all that and the attachés, military attachés were busy all the time and the military aid mission -- MAAG -

- Military Aid and Advisory Group, was running what they'd call end-use missions out in the field. They would go check on American equipment to see how it was being used and the French would have these tactics where they would be using the new equipment brought in for Vietnamese units and they'd hear that an end-use mission was coming. So they'd rush this equipment back to the Vietnamese. So the Americans when they visited would see it and then the French would take it back again. I used to accompany these end-use missions from the information side, you know to show American aid was reaching the Vietnamese, etc. And often the French jeep that was suppose to arrive at 10 in the morning didn't arrive until 1 in the afternoon. The best ploy that the French had to keep us away from any real source of material was the big lunch, the big noontime lunch. Where you'd start with pastis, whatever, and then you'd go through a couple of wines under the hot tropical sun and then you'd have some cognac or Armagnac and by the time you come from that you'd be practically prolapsed and it'd be too late. It'd be time to close the road so you'd have to rush back to wherever you were going.

Q: What were our military attachés doing -- what was our military role at that time?

SIMPSON: We had decided that the French were fighting the good fight in Indochina. This was primarily because of the Korean War and we were trying -- you know the Domino Theory -- trying to keep Southeast Asia and that peninsula out of communist hands. So the American military had to liaise very closely with the French. In the field as well as in Saigon and all this American equipment was pouring in including aircraft, tanks, etc. So there was a lot of working together there and there were a lot of visitors. You know the usual VIP visitors from the Pentagon, from Washington or from the Philippines or from the American bases in Tokyo. And the object was to see that the French got what they needed and then hopefully that they were using it the way it should be used. We were supplying not just equipment but also the money. So in other words, they were holding the left flank in the Far East as far as Washington was concerned. And the French government, one government after another was falling in France often and the Indochina issue was hot. There was a lot of opposition to the war and the army was getting fed-up because they figured they weren't getting what they needed. So it was a constant crisis situation.

Q: What sort of contacts did you have with the French for example?

SIMPSON: Well we had constant contacts with them because we worked with their information service, we were involved in psychological warfare at that time. This was interesting because the Foreign Service Institute hardly prepared you for that sort of thing. And one of the first assignments I was given, being press officer, being in Saigon was, "Don't forget Tuesday is the meeting of the Joint Psychological Warfare Board. And you're going to be the American representative." I knew very little about psychological warfare as did most of the people on the board. This was a joint, there were Vietnamese, French and Americans who sat down and the presiding officer was a French colonel, a parachute officer, who thought propaganda was a joke, anyway. But we had these meetings. That was one way we were working with the French closely. Then we had contacts with a lot of French newspapermen, a lot of media representatives that we were in constant touch with. And also the French, let's see: there was the government information, the army information. They were both sort of competing, we had to touch base with them all the time. And then there were the French officials, who were on the scene. And then

there was Hanoi, we'd travel up to Hanoi quite often and there was a different picture up there.

Q: What was the situation around Hanoi?

SIMPSON: It was, you know, Saigon is sort of a garden spot, everything grows, a beautiful city. At least it can be. But Hanoi is sort of grey. The weather can be very bad, you get grey skies, grey streets, rain, the people, some of them are dressed in grey, black. And it's just a different atmosphere altogether. Add to that the fact that the hot war was going on up there. It was altogether a different atmosphere. You arrive in Hanoi, there were tanks parked. Everybody driving in Saigon, officers driving in jeeps would be driving very slowly and probably well dressed. Up there they'd be whipping through the streets in camouflage outfits and mud all over their jeeps. So you had a different atmosphere and the Tonkinese had been fighting in that war on either side for so long that there was a totally different picture. And you realized how serious the war was. It wasn't guerrilla anymore, we're talking divisions and artillery and all that sort of thing.

Q: What was the feeling about, at that time, the Viet Minh in the Embassy. How did we feel about that?

SIMPSON: Well there were, I suppose you could say there were, two schools of thought, in a way. There were those -- Americans -- who would specialize not so much in Indochina but in Southeast Asia who realized that possibly a golden opportunity had been missed with Ho Chi Minh. You know right after the war when we had helped his fledgling army fight the Japanese in Tonkin. The OSS, that had been lost because we'd gone ahead with the French and had followed through and yet there was still a possibility. There was always talk of a third force. But nobody knew really what the bloody third force was but everybody was looking for it! And then there was the other side that saw it more in black and white. That the Viet Minh were the vanguard of the Chinese armies that would eventually move down like they had in China and extend their power. And the Viet Minh would be their frontmen all throughout Southeast Asia. And so there was some confusion there and also the other problem was that the Viet Minh, placing them in the context of France's future, one of our great goals was to build up the Vietnamese National Army which eventually became the ARVN but there was no backbone there. I don't mean they weren't brave and a lot of them did fight well, but there was no cadre, no reason, no national reason. Whereas the Viet Minh were schooled and trained and believed so much in their cause that they'd take heavy losses and still keep coming back. As they always did. Whereas the National Army, they'd throw these units together, they'd have a French officer. They'd try time and time again. They'd go out on an operation and then they'd just get chopped to pieces because they just did not operate well. And that was our big goal. To build a National Army that would take over the role of national operations.

Q: Did you have a feeling that, we're talking about this time, and here the French were in charge and we're talking about this fighting in a battle that eventually they're going to lose. But the French and Americans have never mixed well together and I suppose we were full of ideas. How did this work together?

SIMPSON: Well it didn't. In a way, it's the tragedy of the whole thing. As I mentioned, this

parachute officer, this Joint Psychological Warfare Board. One of the first things I saw, the French idea of propaganda leaflet was a photo of a French soldier with a submachine gun, standing over about 4 Viet Minh dead. And the words in French and Vietnamese were: If you don't surrender, this will happen to you. It doesn't take a Ph.D. in psychology to figure out that #1 it'll infuriate whoever picks it up or #2 it'll make them laugh and say what idiots these people are. I went to one of the first air drops that went on over so-called enemy lines, in an old Junkers just packed with these leaflets being dropped in the jungle, which was a waste of time. And we often would try to, okay we were naive, we were newcomers, we really didn't know Indochina, we didn't know the people and the French of course resented our presence anyway, particularly military. But we would try to make our little contribution and try to straighten things that we thought were going wrong. And there were inevitable clashes. Particularly with journalists because as USIS officers we were there to help what we could as far as visiting journalist went, not just Americans, British, French and the rest. And there was censorship at the time and all outgoing dispatches would have to be censored so at times the French censor would lay it out with a heavy hand and block stuff that there were no reasons to have blocked. So there were those little irritations. On a higher level, the American military would often come in with what I could see were crazy ideas about what should be done. General Iron Mike O'Daniel was the head of MAAG at one point and before he became head of MAAG he used to fly in. And this was at the time of Dienbienphu. He used to fly in to talk to General Navarre, the French commander and at one point he suggested we should just enclose the whole of North Vietnam in barbed wire, the whole secure area. And that way the "Viet Minh can't get in and they can't get out." Well #1 this is a physical impossibility. Then he wanted to build pillboxes behind this barbed wire, a major cement contract, plus the fact he wanted to man these with Vietnamese troops. Well #2 you didn't have the Vietnamese troops to do it and the French were pulling their hair out every time he arrived because he was always coming up with such ideas.

Q: How did you find dealing with the press at the time?

SIMPSON: Well I didn't find it too hard, I was to find it harder later, during our period. But in those days, the old Hotel Continental Palace in the center of Saigon, was sort of the unofficial press club. Everybody stayed there, the New York Times, Bob Shaplen of the New Yorker had a room there all the time. There were a lot of Americans, Graham Greene was in and out. And all the French, Jean Larteguy and that crowd. But as I'd started my working life as a journalist, I found it a little easier to get along with them than some of the more staid State Department officers. I mean you say information and they run for cover. But we got along well with the press and our office was sort of open house. They were in and out all the time. We couldn't do what we did for them later, you know what I mean, during the American war. We helped them and we exchanged information. We often, let's face it, I don't care where you are, it doesn't have to be in a war situation, but a good journalist who knows the country and is working there, who is in and out quite often. Sometimes he has much better contacts than the officials. It's not just a question of guiding his American official friends, but comparing notes. That way you can get some very valuable information, background. But no, it wasn't bad at all most days.

Q: How about Graham Greene. There's a major collection of Graham Greene papers here in the library. You know thinking about the genesis of The Quiet American the novel which was coming out about this time, at least he was doing his thing. Did you have contact or did you have a feel

where he was coming from?

SIMPSON: Let's put it this way. I first met Greene on the terrace of the Continental Hotel. A very cool reception as far as I was concerned. I wasn't trying to make any points with him. Cool fish handshake and a sort of "Gee I wish I wasn't meeting you," sort of feeling. And I saw him off and on, different press conferences. Just said hello. And it became very obvious that everything he was writing...I'm talking about his articles, were being, okay he had his own point of view and he didn't particularly like Americans. Add to that, he disapproved completely of "American interference" in Indochina as he put it. And also, he was fed a lot of stuff by the French. He was very close to the French. He was very close to a fellow, a French editor, who ran a cultural magazine there and they were together all the time along with this fellow's mistress. In fact, he dedicates the book, The Quiet American, to them, René and Phong. But the amusing thing is, okay, Greene and I weren't the greatest of friends. And one New Year's or just before New Year's, the Viet Minh struck in central Laos, a surprise move that almost cut the country in half. And I got word of it and was to fly up there and join a parachute battalion that I'd known before, Bigeard's outfit, who were sent in there to try to block this move. And so I arrived at Tan Son Nhut airport at about 7 in the morning and there was this little grasshopper type observation plane, waiting, with a pilot with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. And I said, are you so-and-so and he said "Yes. We're flying to Laos?"

"That's right we're going up to Savannakhet." And he said we've got another passenger. It was New Year's day and I had a terrific hangover and along comes Graham Greene, the other passenger. And he has a terrific hangover. So here we are, hardly buddies and we both have these terrific hangovers, in this horrible observation plane that bounced all over the sky. We flew up to Savannakhet and we got out of the plane and we got in a jeep and they're driving us up to Seno. A town where the battalion was, it was hot, it was really hot and we were dying of thirst and we were looking and looking. The roads were empty, we forgot all about security. We weren't worried about that. All we wanted was a cold beer. Finally, like a miracle, we came around the corner of a road and here's this old woman sitting under a half-tent with some dried cigarettes and about 4 bottles of Tiger beer that wasn't iced, just lukewarm. So we bought the beer and we drank this beer. And I think that's the first time that Graham Greene and I ever spoke together but it didn't last long.

Q: Well do you have any feel for why he didn't like Americans, did it come out?

SIMPSON: I don't know. I didn't know that much about Greene's background. I really hadn't read that much of it. For instance, most correspondents would come in, they'd want to speak to Heath or you know, get the word from the top American, whether it'd be a General or Ambassador, just as background. And Greene never made the effort. And you just sensed it when you met him. Whether it was something that had happened earlier or whether he just decided we were going to ruin the whole show.

Q: Did you find that he was sort of immersed in Vietnamese culture?

SIMPSON: He was very interested in it. I must admit, people asked me what I thought of The Quiet American when it came out. I still think it's one of the best novels to come out of Vietnam,

of that period particularly. Because he said a lot without too much effort. He caught the feel of Saigon and the period but I never got that close to him.

Q: Just a little feel. We're 2 gentlemen now in our 60's. You say Saigon was a bachelor's paradise. I mean what was the sort of social life like in Saigon.

SIMPSON: Saigon itself, the street in those days, was called "Rue Catinat" the main street stretching down to the river. And you had these hotels, the Majestic and the Continental, with their big open terraces and their tables out on the sidewalk. Because of the grenade attacks, the restaurants and many of the bars had anti-grenade netting on the doors. And the American crowd, the unquiet Americans, would go out, there'd be a number of cocktail parties, there'd be special dinners but mostly, for a lot of us, it was just getting to know the city. Eating in excellent restaurants. I found a little Corsican restaurant where I use to go all the time. And I used to get, it was sort of like putting your finger on the pulse of Saigon. Because the Corsicans ran everything. They operated the customs, they operated the smuggling, which was a very cozy arrangement. The Corsicans were predominant in the police department. And many of them were in intelligence. There were some in the army in various jobs and some of them were the old Corsicans, the settlers that had been there for years. They were hard drinking, loved good food and all that. And then there were the women, well. There were the Chinese, there were the Vietnamese, there were Laotians, Cambodians, there were a mix of all kinds and let's face it there were some unbelievable places in that town. There was a place called Buffalo Park where a whole block was an army bordello and it had a big sign outside. All weapons and grenades checked here and you'd have all these jeeps parked outside. It was one great big palace packed with all these girls and there was Mama's which was the officer's section and it was attached to this main complex and they were suppose to be a little more select. But when Mama's was busy, she was very busy, she'd run girls from the other section. And in my last book that came out in 1992, I mentioned an incident.

Q: This was the book you wrote. What was the title?

SIMPSON: It was called "Tiger in the Barbed Wire", my own reminisces of that period. Black-Jack Pickering was the Deputy PAO at that time, and he was a wonderful character, he had covered Lindberg's landing in Paris and all that sort of thing. An old newspaper man with a gravelly voice. And he knew that some of his younger officers were spending a lot of time in Mama's because you could go in, you sit and you drink beer and then the women, and so he wanted to see it one night. And he had brought a Cadillac to Saigon as his personal car, a black Cadillac. The Ambassador was very upset about this because once Pickering arrived at an official reception and they quickly ran out with this guard of honor, presented arms because of his Cadillac. So when the Ambassador arrived in his beat-up old Packard, there was no guard of honor. So they arranged that Pickering always arrive later. Well, that night we were driving along and it was the rainy season, a terrific tropical downpour. As we came towards Mama's, I said let's get as close as we can because we'll get soaked if we don't. He said okay and just then he put his foot on the brake of his Cadillac and his foot slipped because it was wet and we went gliding majestically into the front of Mama's. The roof came down on top of us, the girls went climbing up the grenade net of both sides, all the French officers were running out of the place, it was a most undiplomatic situation. We had to get them to hoist up the roof to get the Cadillac

out. So from there on in, outside of the hearing of Black-Jack Pickering, we referred to it as the only drive-in whore house in Saigon.

Q: Did you find in the American community, the official American community, something that would certainly,,I was there '69-'70 and it had well developed, and these were people in the, richer marine terms, these were China coasters. I mean basically these were people who loved the orient, usually had a mistress or two and had settled in. Did you find that this was developing there?

SIMPSON: A little, a little. I guess it was, as you say, I experienced the same thing from '64-'65 as far as Americans go, much more so. But I guess we were just beginning, there were very few who were involved in Indochina or knew it at the time. There were some old OSS types. Not old but I mean former OSS types, who had been there just maybe before the war and during the war, '45 and all that, but there were very few Americans that you could call old Indochina hands. They developed, they became that after a certain period of time.

Q: You were there during Dienbienphu? Could you explain or give a feel for how we viewed this at that time?

SIMPSON: Well, let me say that, before I talk about Dienbienphu itself, let me make the point that I was at Dienbienphu itself. At the beginning, when it was taken and for a few weeks thereafter. And being, the privilege of being a so-called war-correspondent, is that you can move when you want. And there was no secret, it was time to get out. I did, but going back to talk about the American position. The whole plan at Dienbienphu was based on the false premise that the Viet Minh would attack over open ground and the French air force and artillery would chop them up and this would be a great defeat and probably the turning point of the war, etc. etc. And there had been a battle the year before in Nassin that sort of indicated this could happen, they took some heavy losses there. But from the very beginning, American observers began to worry about this situation because of, the Korean War had ended, and one of the great phrases of the Korean war was to take the high ground. While at Dienbienphu, although the French had argued that they were on elevated ground, they were still dominated by the surrounding mountains, you see. So in reality, they were still in the chamber pot, as they say. And American military people going there would mouth platitudes about -- isn't this nice and strong fortifications and all that. But they were quite concerned. One of their concerns was that here are some of the best battalions that the French have in Indochina and they're sitting here immobile while all the Viet Minh have to do is go around them and not worry about it. And also, the Americans, an unfortunate trait that still goes on I think, we overestimate the importance of air power. And we thought, you know, air power is going to do this and going to do that. Well, it didn't. And it never has. It never will as far as I'm concerned. Anyway, this was another great fallacy and yet, once the battle was joined there, we did all we could as far as sending in stuff. The French kept requesting different things. Part of the problem was that at the beginning they were so confident that they didn't foresee the problem. The simple question of resupplying this base by air was a terrific strain. And they should have had twice as many aircraft for what they wanted to do, but they didn't. At one point as you know, there was a question of Admiral Radford setting up contingency plans for an air strike. And there was great talk and contingency plans about using nuclear weapons, which as far as I was concerned would have been a great disaster, as you

would have probably wiped out the French along with the Vietnamese. And politically as far as the Far East goes, it would be the second use of a nuclear weapon, by Americans against Asians. But Dienbienphu was the type of place where, it's easy to say now, but you didn't have to be a military genius to see the writing on the wall. And a lot of the troops, the good experienced officers that were there said, "You know this is going to be a real fight." You could tell that they weren't sure that it was going to come out right. They ended up, you know everything had to be supplied by parachute and that doesn't work very well.

Q: You were there at the fall of Dienbienphu in Indochina. How did this impact on the Embassy? What was the sort of feeling at that time?

SIMPSON: Let me correct one thing, I was on home leave when Dienbienphu actually fell on May 7th, I was in San Francisco as a matter of fact.

Q: But when you returned...

SIMPSON: When I returned?

Q: When did you return?

SIMPSON: I returned I think it was July and it was a big difference, there was a big difference in atmosphere. There was heightened tension between the French and the Americans. They'd lost, they were trying to readjust to this new situation. They knew they'd lost Indochina. A lot of them blamed it on us. That we could have brought in more supplies or done something, mainly supplied an air strike. And there was great confusion among the Vietnamese and there was a sudden swing of many among influential Vietnamese, who had been with the French, who could tell what was going on. Towards the American who were the new boys on the block. And so this was very difficult for the embassy to handle and of course this was a period where we were putting Ngo-Dinh-Diem into the prime minister's office. Ed Lansdale, you know, the CIA team, were there putting him in place and I worked for, with them, and worked as a press advisor for Diem for a short time. And it was a weird period, this king-making business. You know Americans are not very used to it.

Q: Again, not looking at it from the prospective of today, but at that time, what was your impression of Lansdale, the CIA operation, what were you doing with them?

SIMPSON: Well, what we were doing was, from the beginning, you see Lansdale had been coming out there, checking with facilities and newspapers and all that before the installation of Diem. He'd come out and he'd work with the French and he'd have a lot of liaison with French intelligence, and then when this Diem thing came up, his team came in and setup their operation, their office. I must say that a lot of people poor mouthed Ed Lansdale and what he did. But I think you've got to take into account that at moments of crisis there are certain men who can do certain things. Whether you approve or disapprove well that's another thing. And Ed was one of these people who just built loyalty among those who worked for him and he also had this quiet American routine where they all say, well the ugly American.

Q: Lansdale was considered...there's a book by Lederer called "The Ugly American." Burnett or something...

SIMPSON: And I think that people misread Lansdale a lot. Where they thought 100% this idea that all you had to do was go play some guitar and be nice to the local people and everything would be fine. Whereas Lansdale was not that naive. His point was that you're not going to get very far unless... It's not that old hearts and minds thing, but you've got to have some base in the villages. Not just in the cities. Our role, USIS, as far as the Lansdale team at that time, the Saigon military mission, we were on the ground, we knew the editors, Vietnamese, French, whatever, we knew the newspapers, we had the basic information, we'd sat in and worked with the French on psychological warfare. So therefore we were sort of adjunct, helping when they needed help. And as I say, George Hellyer, who was PAO when Lansdale came in. Hellyer had been with Wingate in Burma.

Q: Ord Wingate.

SIMPSON: Yeah. Hellyer was an ex, was an ex-tea planter and he spoke perfect French. And he and Lansdale hit it off very well. And so they worked together very closely. And one of the first things when Diem arrived -- and they both came back from their first meeting with Diem -- and they sent me over immediately to talk to Diem about the problems of speaking to the international press, because he was basically naive as far as that sort of thing went. So many of the people were out to get him. You know, the axes were out. And if he walked into a press conference cold without realizing how important it was, he could have said things that could undermine his whole government from the very beginning. So we spent quite a bit of time working with the Vietnamese and the Agence Vietnam Press and the radio and all this sort of thing.

Q: Well tell me about one, your impression of Diem and also how he took it because at least later on Diem had the reputation of either giving a long monologue or just sitting there like a Buddha and hearing things and apparently nothing connected. This is early Diem. Again your impression and how did he work towards your practical advice that you were sent to give him?

SIMPSON: Well I'll never forget, it was a very strange situation. I went into the palace, was ushered in, the palace was sort of a mess because all the French advisors and officers had disappeared and Diem was being protected by a catholic militia from up in the north and they all had muddy boots and the marble was all...it was usually so brilliantly polished and the rugs had been removed. And there were rifles stacked in the corner, expecting trouble from all sides. And I was ushered in, told to wait, and suddenly a man came in without being announced, all by himself and it was Diem and he had, he was chubby you know, lacquered hair somewhat long sort of like an American Indian appearance. And we shook hands and we sat down and started talking French and I explained who I was and why I was there and the importance of the international press. And that what he says, at anytime would be in the New York Times, the London Times, and you know, the Figaro the next day. I knew that he was aware of this but that there're so many pitfalls, on and on, and that we were willing to help. And he sat there chain smoking cigarettes with his head sort of down, you know, listening to this, and I finally paused and waited and he looked at me and started to talk. He gave me a lecture about the evils of

communism, what he was going to do for the people in Vietnam, etc., etc. To the point where I began to wonder if he didn't realize that I wasn't a journalist out to get a story. That I was there to help him in any assistance he needed as an official. And after 20 minutes of this, I noticed some of his assistants pacing back and forth and waiting and they dared not come and break it up. And finally he stopped and the interview ended. And he went off with the cigarette smoke trailing behind him. This was an early symptom that he developed later. Number one that he didn't listen and he tended to lecture. He tended to lecture like a professor to important people who were not Catholics, the Buddhists and Cao Dai, all those sects, as if they were little children. And this went over like a lead balloon. I think at the very beginning he was a sincere enough man. But his brother you could see was already moving in, hanging on the edges of everything.

Q: This was his brother who was later assassinated.

SIMPSON: That's right.

Q: Was Madame Nhu...

SIMPSON: She was there but an unknown quantity. She was charming, at least visually, and she was fluttering around, flirting with all the French and American officers. The first cocktail party in the palace, she was there in her tight ai-dao. But she hadn't come forward as a power at least as far as we knew.

Q: Well did you have anymore contact with Diem or...?

SIMPSON: No it sort of...Well of course there was the Binh Xuyen revolt that took place shortly after he was in...

Q: The what?

SIMPSON: This was a revolt of the sects, the religious military sects. The Binh Xuyen were leading the revolt. They were the river pirates whom the French had used to fight the Viet Minh. Who had supplied the French with a lot of intelligence information. And that was a very strange situation. Because Diem was our man in Saigon, we were trying to secure him in place. And the French intelligence people -- who were run by a Corsican who was a very tough character -- decided that despite the agreements between Paris and Washington, despite the handshakes with the French high ranking military and the Americans, that they were going to supply the Binh Xuyen and the Cao Dai and all their old intelligence contacts with the arms and equipment to screw up the American plan to put Diem in place. And this was a very hairy situation because you know there were assassinations, there was fighting in the streets, they shelled the palace, there was a counter attack. And at one point... I don't know if you want me to go into detail on this or not.

Q: Well, I'm really interested in how we saw it at the time and what you were doing?

SIMPSON: Well, we saw this as possibly the end of any hope in Vietnam. Because if this revolt had succeeded it would have been the splintering of the South. And under pressure, despite the

agreement, it divided temporarily the country in two. With the success of any revolt in the South, it would have meant splintering, the whole chance of having any viable government down there. And so we were doing our best to try to discourage any of these sects. Lansdale was very active in this. It's all on record that money played a big part in persuading certain units and leaders of these sects to come over to the government and not take part in things and yet a number did fight. Diem had a very difficult 24 hours there where it was a question of one or two parachute battalions...whether they would stay loyal to the government. Fortunately they did and they fought well without any advisors. Without any French or American help. But one little side light on this -- in the past we were always getting these calls from these mysterious little men in white suits who wanted to talk to you about something important and one of these turned out to be the political advisor to the Binh Xuyen who knew me and he knew I'd been there since 1952 and I'd been with the French quite a bit. So he asked me to come to General Bay Vien's headquarters which was across the river, the Arroyo Chinois, and to talk. What it came down to, General Bay Vien was the river pirate chief and here again he had his own private zoo with its boa constrictor and a tiger and the rumor was that when his officers went bad he would feed them to the tiger. And so I went over, we drove over, myself and Bob Gildea who was Assistant press officer, and we went through these road blocks. There'd been a sort of temporary truce between both sides, we drove down into the headquarters with a big tall aerial, radio aerials there, and we walked in and sat down and started talking and I was looking toward the door where obviously this aerial was at the end of that building. And as I watched this door, out comes this French captain with some papers and he's making marks and he looks up and sees me sitting there and he swings around quick and slams the door and disappears. And a little bit later, in charges this French dispatcher rider. Jumps off his motorcycle, rushes into that back room with the radio. And so I came out and said to Gildea, the French are running this whole operation. He said I saw, there've been 2 dispatch riders since I've been parked out here so we went back to the Embassy. I won't go into details as to who, what, when, where. So I went back to the Embassy and reported what had happened and created quite a flap. The Embassy checked with the highest French source and were told that those were members of the Good Offices mission working with the Binh Xuyen to stop the fighting. Well that just doesn't wash as far as I'm concerned because these officers were obviously in a tactical situation and not working to stop the fighting. They were right there in the Binh Xuyen headquarters. But that just shows you the differences in attitudes and reporting. But anyway the revolt was crushed and Diem became Prime Minister for good, and after that, not too long after that, I left Saigon. He gave me an autographed picture when I left in August. So that was the end of that period.

Q: Before we move on to Nigeria, would you talk about the fall of Hanoi and that whole business and also the move, I mean the whole evacuation of the northern Vietnamese down south.

SIMPSON: Shortly after Dienbienphu, when I returned, I was ordered to go up to Hanoi and start preparations for evacuation of the USIS staff. And to find out how many dependents would be involved and all that sort of thing. The consulate was undergoing the same thing as was the American aid mission up there. And here again you have the problem where some of the staff wanted to take an extended family down south. On one extreme you had an old man who was a cleaner of the building who had timidly suggested that he and his wife might be included in a flight to the south and even offered a gift that cost him money to the American in charge which was sort of heart rending. The other extreme was a sharp operator who spoke both English and

French who had several mistresses whom he tried to list as cousins or nieces or whatever. Needless to say, he managed to fly down on his own steam. And I made sure that this cleaner got out too. It was just a question of cleaning everything up, and getting ready to go. At the same time I was told to stay there and to cover the arrival of Giap's divisions in Hanoi. There were a whole group of newspapermen who had come from all over and were staying in the Metropole hotel to cover the big day. It was Oct. '54 and it was a rainy day and it was a strange thing because it was a great victorious parade for the Viet Minh but because they were all wearing sneakers there was a sort of shush-shush-shush sound. It was one of those silent victory marches. It was very impressive and it was interesting because the French withdrew street by street as the Viet Minh marched in. And as the Viet Minh marched in all the windows would open and out would come all these red flags, yellow starred red flags that had been under preparation for weeks behind closed doors. So I was there taking photos with a velleflex and I must say I got some pretty good photos which USIA used quite a bit, I put some in my book on Dien Bien Phu that's coming out this year. And I was supposedly -- for the purpose it wasn't a question of cover so I wouldn't have any problems -- but I was supposedly a Polish press officer and the only problem there was the truce commission also had some Poles on it so I had to stay clear of the Poles, not speaking the language at all. And finally, John Mecklen of Time-Life, who later joined USIA and served in Saigon years later, tipped me off. The French had passed the word that the Viet Minh military police were looking for an American official posing as a journalist. And so it was time for me to leave. But I might mention during that period I shared a jeep with Lou Conein, who was Lansdale's man in North Vietnam, and Lou Conein, quite a character, he was a Colonel, quite a colorful character, he was known by various names-Black Luigi, 3 Finger Lou. He'd been in Vietnam before the Franco-Vietnam war, he'd been with OSS, he'd been parachuted into north Vietnam, he had saved a lot of prisoners. He'd received a Legion of Honor from the French for saving their men in prison camps. And he was later to surface during the Diem assassination as Cabot Lodge's liaison man with the generals of Saigon. This is much later. But in any case, I left Hanoi that evening in a truck of Senegalese troops for Haiphong where this big refuge movement was being set up. The French at first thought that they could handle the refugees but they just didn't have enough ships so the American Navy had come in and the American flagship was lying off shore, Admiral Sabin was in charge. We were preparing to sail all these refugees south. Most were Catholics from the Catholic delta regions and they were moving along with their priest, with their militia, etc., etc., to the south. And being Diem was a Catholic, you had the situation where it wasn't going to do him any harm to have that many voters from the same religion in the south. And Lansdale and his people were very much involved in this moving people. And it was a very difficult job. It was done well but a tragedy because these people had been living in these villages for hundreds of years and they had to leave their ancestors graves behind and even if they were Catholics there was still that sort of thing. I traveled down from Haiphong on the flag ship to Saigon. And one little vignette, in Saigon, when we pulled in, it was a hot sunny, very hot day and we pulled in and all these refugees had put on a little weight because they'd been well fed by the Navy on the way down but a lot of them were sick and a lot of them had different diseases and they needed care. So as we pulled in there where all these trucks were drawn up to take them to refugee camps and I noted that at the end of the gang plank there's this little gathering of American women. I looked closer and sure enough it was the American Women's Club of Saigon and they were there to greet the refugees. And I must say, I don't want to appear anti-women's club but it wasn't their place to be there in that squalor and in that situation. Here they were in their bright summer

dresses, some of them with hats on in the old diplomatic mode. I won't say some had gloves on though I wouldn't doubt it and they were there to hand out a hunk of plastic wrapped American cheese that had been donated by an American cheese company. A hunk of American cheese and some bananas to each refugee as they came down off the gangplank. And of course I looked real hard and saw that one of our best photographers had been mustered to shoot them handing these things to the refugees. And I was furious about it but couldn't do much to stop it as it was under way. But the sidelight on that was that a couple days later word came from the refugee camp that all the refugees were complaining about the American soap because no matter how hard they scrubbed they wouldn't get much lather -- it was the American cheese. So when they found out it was cheese they sold it on the black market to street vendors who in turn sold it to the servants of the American diplomatic community and for months thereafter, your hor d'oeuvres at cocktail parties were melted American cheese.

Q: Shall we move on to your next assignment then or if there's anything else. I'm talking about your personal experiences, let's get them, I'd rather get them now and we may have to do this next year.

SIMPSON: Well I think just in general on the war, the Franco-Vietnam war, it had quite an impression on me being that I had been out on the field so much. In fact one of the last battles of the war, after I had returned, I was at a place called Hu Nugen and this Viet Minh Regional battalion attacked what they thought was a Vietnamese National Army unit. And they thought it was easy pickings or whatever and it turned out to be a French army unit that was dug in. And I arrived the morning after the night attack and they had just slaughtered them. The attackers had been slaughtered as they came on and even the French who were there, they were telling themselves -- why did this happen because the war was almost over and these were peasants, regional peasants, who'd come on bravely in the face of impossible fire. And it just became a symbol of the whole war, really, because I'd seen it in different situations. I'd seen the Moroccans take casualties and the Algerians and I'd seen the Senegalese, and I'd seen the Viet Minh and the Cambodians and the Foreign Legion. And it became the sort of thing where I'd leave the field, I'd go back to Saigon, take up my job as a press officer at the embassy and find a certain unreality at the conference tables in Saigon or at the social events. That the war, that Saigon was really untouched by the war and that what they were talking about was a lot of myth. What I had seen and come back and reported on was accepted up to a point, I think. But let's face it, I was a young officer, I was inexperienced, I was not a military man and a lot of it was they were buying what they wanted to hear from certain sources. They were accepting what they wanted to hear, a human tendency. And when I'd come in and say look the French aren't doing this or they are doing this contrary to what they told us. Or that the Vietnamese light battalions were disasters, they're not working, this battalion's been ambushed, that battalion's been decimated. I'd come in and say the French parachutists are the only people who are doing anything worth while and the use of French armor is usually a joke...little things like that. The reason I'm bringing this up now is that when I left Saigon in '55 I'd had it. I was burned out...so much so that I quit the Foreign Service. I resigned and we left Saigon, sailed out of the harbor and went to Mallorca to live for six months. I met my wife in Saigon on the terrace of the Continental Hotel. She was a secretary working for MSA and we, it's one of those things where the courting went on for some while. Then I went back to the states on home leave and I finally sent her a telegram from Boulder Creek, California saying will you marry me and answer c/o Johnny's cash store, Boulder Creek

California. And she finally flew in and we were married in Las Vegas which is her hometown, and then we went back together, I mean we went back to Saigon together. But when I did resign in '55 the idea was to write the great novel on Saigon. And we went to Mallorca.

Q: I'll tell you because of time constraint, unless there's something we should cover here I'm going to do a little skipping around. Why don't we go back to Saigon you were recalled to Saigon '64-'65, which is a whole different world I suppose, how did that assignment come about and what were you doing?

SIMPSON: That takes us back to Cannes in a way. I was on the beach in front of the Carlton Hotel with George Stevens Jr. (director of USIA film programs), Arthur Schlesinger (historian) and Gore Vidal (writer), at about 10 in the morning and it was after a film had been shown the night before and we were discussing this film. Suddenly the beach boy that handles the beach and the chairs came down and waves to me and he says, they want you on the phone. So I pick up the phone in the beach hut and it was my wife calling from the hotel and she says you better get up here right away. I didn't know what that was, maybe one of the kids were sick or something. So I left and went to the hotel and she said there'd been a very strange message from Paris. I said what's that? She said I don't know but they want to talk to you and here's the number. The duty officer was calling from Paris so I got the duty officer on the line. I said what's the story? Well there's a classified message and you'd better get back to Marseille soon as you can to read it. I said I'm sure you can tell me what the story is. So anyway he's some young officer there and he didn't want to say anything so I called Marseille knowing that they would have a copy. I got someone I knew on the phone and I said, what's the story? And they said well it's about an assignment somewhere you've been before and he said it's classified. And I thought they sure as hell aren't sending a classified message about me going back to Lagos. So anyway we packed up and off to Marseille and there was this secret telegram from the agency from Carl Rowan, saying that (you say the agency you mean USIA) I was assigned as the Information Advisor to Prime Minister, General Nguyen Van Khanh and giving me 2 weeks to get to Saigon and specifying that I was to stop at Pearl Harbor for a major conference that was going on, on my way out. So this, as you can imagine, was a great turmoil because my wife was pregnant. And we had the 3 young girls already and she was pregnant and she'd have to stay behind while I went on ahead. It turned out that this was a great project that had been hatched in Washington. President Johnson had decided that the Vietnamese just couldn't cut it on their own and that therefore we had to send people. He said, send a brain trust in on different levels of skills and expertise to run, in so many words, to run the Vietnamese government for the Vietnamese. Even then on the face of it, it's ridiculous but that's what it was. And strangely enough I don't know how it happened, but USIA was the first to respond and I was the boy that was sent out there and arrived in Honolulu for this famous conference and here was Maxwell Taylor, Secretary Rusk, McCone of CIA. You know, the whole upper level there. I guess I was the lowest ranking man in the room. I sat there over these 2 days of conferences with Barry Zorthian who was in charge of the JUSPAO operation in Saigon which was quite an enormous thing. But the idea was that this was a review and new planning and all this and we were really going to take over things there. And to me it was a revelation. I sat and listened to all these reports and these high level briefings and these secret reports. And I had this ominous feeling that we'd gotten no further than we had when

I'd left. Even when I'd been there, the French, just because of their experience, had their feet more on the ground than what I was hearing in this conference. This sterilized, sound-proof, air-conditioned conference room full of young colonels, who had stainless steel pointers, were discussing Vietnam as if it was the moon. So anyway, I went on from there to take on this job in Saigon.

Q: What was the political situation when you got there? This would be in '64?

SIMPSON: It was very tenuous. There had been, before Diem had been assassinated, the generals had taken over, the military were running the country. Suddenly General Nguyen Khanh, who was a great manipulator and a behind the scenes operator, found himself or put himself in the cat bird seat. And Khanh had a good war record as a young officer with the French, he'd gone through French military schools and all that. But he was a type of person who thrived on intrigue and playing different sides against the other. He was facing a big problem, the Buddhists were strong, he had to take care of them. The Catholics were strong, he had to butter them up. He was worried about the Sects...who still had the fragments of their original armies. The Viet Cong were getting stronger and we had this weird situation where although Cabot Lodge was still there he was getting ready to leave and Maxwell Taylor was coming out to take over along with Alexis Johnson as the two ambassadors. And Khanh had to walk lightly or try to walk lightly with the Americans because we were supplying everything, keeping him in power. At the same time he resented the Americans telling him what he had to do. It was a very strange situation. In fact, Cabot Lodge took me when I arrived...he took me over and introduced me to the Prime Minister in his armored checkered cab and we walked into the palace and we sat down. And Khanh came in...a chubby fellow in sharply creased military trousers and polished boots. And he went through this routine; how glad he was that I was there to help him on this important thing and all this. Lodge was preparing to return to politics and his mind was back in Washington, and suddenly the Prime Minister said well I want you to meet the man you'll be working with in my office. And the light was sort of in my eyes against the window there and I could see a Vietnamese walking in like that and as he came around the corner, he said, ah Simpson! And I looked at him and it turned out to be a fellow whom I had worked with on the French Psychological Warfare Board. Who had been in government jobs through every regime -- managed to stay on top. And who I knew had worked with French intelligence. And here he was the right hand man in the press office of the Prime Minister! And so I was to work with him which was a great twist. But in the long run what it turned out was that Khanh had no more idea of using me for anything. He considered me a plant in his office to watch him and he quickly moved me as far away as possible into another building. And this whole idea of a brain trust to help the Vietnamese get their government moving fell apart completely. You know, people lost interest in it or something changed. And it just so happened that I was the only one who arrived out there. So I was sort of stranded in this office trying to do a job. Succeeding on certain things, getting him to go out of the country. Lodge was pushing this quite a bit and I continued it. Until he almost got caught in a mortar barrage and he didn't speak to me for some time. And then gradually whatever effective curves I had went rapidly down and I became more involved in JUSPAO things and field trips and all that. And my Prime Minister counseling or advising just tailed off. And then there was one coup after another. And the man I was working with at one point was colonel Pham Ngoc Thao who was famous for his participation or setting up of coups. And he became a very good friend of mine and he was a very funny type. He and I got along

fine. We had adjoining offices and we went through these coups together. He always disappeared. I knew a coup was coming when he disappeared. And I did a lot of reporting via phone back to the embassy because I was in the Prime Minister's office surrounded by hostile tanks. And to cap off the story on Thao was that in '91 I think...no '90 Stan Karnow was back in Vietnam. (He wrote a very good book on Vietnam history.) So anyway he went back and he established without a doubt that Colonel Thao was a top, North Vietnamese agent operating inside South Vietnam. So much for our counterintelligence operation! When I went back to Vietnam in '91 I found his grave. Because the Vietnamese were claiming his body was moved north and then when I was up north, no no no we don't know where it is. And finally an ex-officer in the Viet Cong came up to me and asked, do you want to see Thao's grave and I said yes, and he said he'd pick me up Sunday morning and he picked me up in his little car and took me out there. It was one of those strange things. Okay he was "the enemy" and yet he was a good friend at the time. And I wanted to see that grave because I wanted to confirm in my own mind that this was true and it's true enough he's in the Patriot's Cemetery with a big red star on his tomb.

Q: Well how was our embassy doing? I mean you were in the Prime Minister's office area and these coups were happening which was really one Prime Minister succeeding another wasn't it, and all generals, it was a revolving door. How did you find our embassy was reacting? Were they always trying to see, well this one might be better than the other. I mean were they able to deal with it, or was it just resignation or what were you thinking?

SIMPSON: Well it was disarray really. I don't know, I'm sure this may have happened in other countries but maybe not so often, and not under such serious conditions. Where the whole country is threatening to go down the drain. Because here the North Vietnamese were pouring in, you know, along the Ho Chi Minh trails. There were shipments of ammunition along the coast from the North, that sort of thing. And for instance Maxwell Taylor, you know he'd never been faced with anything like this before. I'm sure I can't speak for him, but I would imagine in his mind, as a military man, that these people were generals therefore you could expect a modicum of performance and logic and honesty from them. And when they started this coup, counter-coup, coup-ette, and all this, one after the other, where you couldn't tell what division was moving onto what town, who was on who's side. Whether the Rangers were with the Prime Minister or against him. Taylor just couldn't figure this out. And he had the famous, I can't put a date on it offhand, but he had this famous situation after one such coup he called in the young Turks as they called them, a group of generals including the Air Force general (Ky) who was like a cowboy. And chewed them out like you would a sergeant and just gave them hell. Which was very bad news because I saw them come out of that office and they were white faced. A marine guard saluted them and they didn't even return his salute they were so upset, they just took off. And immediately thereafter Khanh tried to do all sorts of anti-American things and Ky was there with the same thing again. But it was just two cultures that didn't work together. And these generals, they had been, how could you put it, they had been spoiled in a way, it was a different life. Some of them hadn't been in the field for a long while and people were buying their way out of the army or into non-combat roles and making fortunes on the black market and there was a lot of corruption. And the sad thing is that some of the very good officers died fighting at the end.

But from my view point over there, one day I walked into my office and I saw a lot of tanks outside and I thought, good they're here to protect the government. Only when I walked into my office I thought, wait a minute, those turrets are pointed the wrong way, they're all facing the presidential palace. And I walked into my office and there are a bunch of Vietnamese Rangers. Those were real cowboys with dark glasses and tattoos on their arms. They'd just taken everything off my desk, thrown them on the floor and broken everything. They'd urinated in the corner of the room. The captain had his booted foot on the desk, he had a swagger stick. And there's this moment of silence and I didn't know how it was going to turn out, you could never tell with them. And I looked at the situation, I looked at the desk and automatically I said, "Oh merde!" He spoke enough French to realize what I said and he laughed and that broke the tension. And so he asked me what are you doing here, and when I told him that I was an advisor to the Prime Minister they thought that was the funniest thing they'd ever heard. They all started laughing, laughing. Then I asked him what are you doing here? We're here to protect the Prime Minister. Why? Because his office has been taken over by the communists. I said no, that's ridiculous. Oh yes, we've been told. Just about then an American Ranger officer walked in, tanned and fit. I said, "Do you realize what's going on here?" and "We were told to come into town because there's a communist revolt or something and we're suppose to protect the palace." I said, if you look closely you'll see these Rangers are getting ready to assault the palace with all these tanks out here. He thought about that for a while and he raised some people on the radio. And I said, I don't know about you but I'm leaving here because, just about then, Barry Zorthian was on the phone. I'd called him at the office. And General Ky had threatened to start bombing these coup forces, there's a certain time limit. So I told this American Ranger, look I'm leaving, I don't know what you want to do but it'd be silly to die here with a bunch of characters that are trying to overthrow the government. So I took off, and I saw him as I drove off, I saw him walking fast in the other direction. But that was the kind of thing that was going on at that time. Very weird.

Q: Did you work with Barry Zorthian that much?

SIMPSON: Yes.

Q: He became quite a well known name. How did he operate?

SIMPSON: Well Barry was a very unusual and he hadn't had experience in the Far East before, and he was suddenly put into this job. But he was a real pro as far as public information or whatever you want to call it. He had a gift of seeing a situation and realizing what the government's interests were and yet putting it in succinct enough phraseology that it would come across clear to whomever he was briefing. And he realized that the 5 o'clock follies, the briefings that went on downstairs everyday for the general press, were fine in their way but, in reality, those newsmen in the know didn't pay any attention to them. And so therefore he had special briefings, you know one on one or three or four regulars that he knew and all this sort of thing, depending on what the situation was. And we worked. I was tasked out of his office to work with the Vietnamese Information Service as liaison on certain projects. And time after time, Barry Zorthian and I would walk up and down these stairs in the Ministry of Information because every coup that came along you'd get a new Minister of Information and we'd go through this same routine about the polite chatter, the tea, and the table and a cigarette or whatever. And then

talking about what we planned to do or what we hoped we could cooperate on. And you could see this veil of disinterest fall over their faces as we talked. And Barry would sit there trying to explain what should be done. But he fit that particular job and I think in general...okay, there were clashes, as there always are, between somebody like that and the press. In a situation like that but I think on the whole most of the pressmen and the professionals appreciated Zorthian. Because he gave it to them straight, what he could. And he didn't hesitate to let them go where they wanted to go. And he got a lot of flack from various generals and some of the ambassadors about, you know, why are you encouraging them to go to such and such a place; I mean two of them are there already and they're going to come back and give a briefing that shoots down whatever the Army wants to say.

Q: Well, what was your impression of the American press at that time? We're talking about the '64-'65 frame.

SIMPSON: Well it hadn't developed into the real press corps that it had later on. This was a period where people like Neil Sheehan and, well I can't think of the other names. There's a whole new breed of pressmen out there, there's still some of the old hangers-on from the French war that would come and go where they were trying to get. One of the problems we faced was that they were only interested in the American participation. Really most of them, not exactly hometowners but still: Is it true that the American Rangers were attached to such and such and as advisors were actually in the combat area. You know this sort of thing. And is it true that American Air Force pilots have done such and such? We hadn't really gotten into the war officially but they were well aware that we were close to it and they're following all this closely. And they had little interest unless there was a major defeat or major victory. As far as the Vietnamese national role in the fighting, I think they were doing a pretty good job of reporting and that's what made them so unpopular with the officials there.

You know Johnson was blowing his top. He was a great telephone practitioner and he'd be on the phone to the Embassy to Taylor and the others. On the little, the slightest things that would come up. Why can't you do this or why can't you do that? He didn't understand what was going on out there. And what it came down to, because of the wide open, you know, no censorship deal, that was unique to Vietnam at that time. We would fly them anywhere they wanted to go and fly them back again. I mean chopper them in and chopper them out. So that they were often on the scene of the action, they'd come back and they'd arrive in time for the 5 o'clock follies and here's some Army major briefing on the same battle from second-hand news that was all wrong. He'd be briefing on, reading off the official report he'd gotten through radio or something. "And such a such a unit was attacked and the Vietnamese fought bravely and so many dead Viet Cong were found on the ground," and somebody from the back would shout, excuse me major, excuse me major, but I just came from there and that's all bullshit. I was there, the Vietnamese lost so many people, the Viet Cong pulled out and they only left two dead behind. Blah, blah, blah, this sort of thing. So it was this sort of problem that went on constantly.

And some of the correspondents, the American press there, I must admit there were some funny instances. General Westmoreland was a very straight arrow, serious type, and he'd give these briefings occasionally. He'd come over and give these special briefings. And there was a correspondent, Joe Freid of the New York Daily News, and Joe was the old school, very

perceptive, acerbic correspondent, and one day, Westmoreland gave this whole story, I forget what it was but it was something very positive. And everybody sort of you know, yes, yes. And then Joe said, are you finished General? And Westmoreland said, yes Joe, I am. And Joe said good, now let's get serious. And he started asking his questions.

Q: Well, was there anything else that we should cover around this time when you were there? I found your time in the Prime Minister's office fascinating.

SIMPSON: Oh, one little sidelight to show you how the two periods sort of blended. One day I got back to the office and on my desk was a telephone message. A Mr. Anh or somebody was calling me, to get in touch with the Hoa Hao. So I got in touch with them and he was a representative of the Hoa Hao, one of the military sects that had revolted against Diem, and asking me if I would come to dinner etc. I didn't particularly want to do this. I was in a very difficult situation there. It was ridiculous in a way. My assignment had been classified. Well, how the hell can you be an information and press advisor if your very presence is classified in the palace? They'd done that I think, primarily to preserve, I mean the Vietnamese didn't want people to think that they needed advice and all this sort of thing. Or that we were, or they didn't want the American press to know that we were sending people into the Vietnamese government offices. But anyway that soon blew over and everybody knew, I mean there was no doubt about it. So these people got in touch with me and it turns out that I was being invited to dinner to one of the best restaurants in Saigon, an old French parachute hangout, by the widow of Bacut who had been the head of the Hoa Hao, a real character who had cut off some of his fingers. He said he'd cut off one every year until the French left. He was eventually captured by the Diem forces and executed. He was betrayed in fact. But anyway, in 1965 here I am in the situation where I'm invited. So I check with the political people and what do you think? They say any bit of information we can get now is gold. The situation being what it is, so go ahead and have a good meal, see what's going on. Well, it wasn't hard to figure out what they wanted. They wanted, they gave me all this stuff -- you know Vietnam, you were here when the French were here, and all this routine. Incidentally, his wife was a knockout. She was a little teenager when I knew her before and she developed into a beauty in a black ao dai, a form fitting ao dai. And so this little political advisor was with her. We had this very good meal and what it came down to was...they wanted American arms, American money and with that they would form once again a hard fighting anti-communist force, etc. They didn't say that they would support the government at all. And I, all I could do was say well that's very interesting and I will report everything that you'd said and onward and upward and all this sort of thing. And then just as we were leaving, and I look back on this often with mixed emotions, this dream in an ao dai said, "Can I drop you off at your home?" And in a few split seconds that it takes a brain to work, I said, "No thanks, I've got an embassy car." I thought to myself, you fool. But it wouldn't have been politically smart, I think.